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MRS. BLAKE:

A STORY OF TWENTY YEARS.

BY

MRS. NEWTON CROSLAND,

AUTHOR OF "MEMORABLE WOMEN," "HILDRED, THE DAUGHTER," ETC.

" ——— the spirit's gravitation
Still must differ from the tear's."
ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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MRS. BLAKE.

CHAPTER I.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

"Each substance of a grief hath twenty shadows,
Which show like grief itself, but are not so."

SHAKSPERE.

THE doctors were right in saying that any fresh mental shock would be likely to aggravate Mr. Blake's malady; but Matthew Simmonds was wrong in his estimate of what would constitute such a shock.

A very subtle process had been going on in Compton Blake's soul ever since the hour when he listened to the strange preacher; and, perhaps, it was a consequence of that process that humiliations and distresses, which came in the shape of personal punishment,

were met by him with a calmness and cheerful resignation that surprised the acquaintances who had no clue to the inner maze of his life and character. The fresh "shocks" which were in reality retarding his recovery, consisted in the announcements which from time to time were made to him of little circumstances, and what to others often seemed unimportant facts, but which to the ruined merchant opened up long vistas through which he saw the far-extending woe his heedless extravagance and speculative trading had occasioned. Thus it happened that those who were admitted to the presence of the sufferer often held an invisible shield, so to speak, over some invulnerable spot, while they left the Achillean heel quite unprotected.

Be it remembered that for a little while they indulged the hope that creditors would be forbearing and friendly; and that after a compromise with them, achieved at the sacrifice of Mr. Blake's entire fortune, the house of Blake and Co. would be re-established in business, though on a terribly reduced scale. Above all, they calculated on the co-operation of the great Liverpool house, notwithstanding it had replied "impossible" to Mr. Blake's

last urgent entreaty for assistance. Oh! if her husband could but recover his health, Clara felt assured that competence at least might still be theirs. And perhaps she prayed for its restoration with more fervour than she had ever prayed before; but prayed as for the all-powerful means which were to bring about the ends she thought most desirable. Possibly prayers of this kind are commoner than supplicants believe.

Only by degrees did it dawn upon her that her husband had no forbearance to expect from those he had injured, and very little assistance to rely on from those on whom he had most claims. And all this while the sufferer could not walk without assistance, or hold a pen in his right hand.

But though aid and sympathy did not proceed from quarters where they would have seemed a natural growth, much real kindness cropped out in unexpected places. The two physicians who had been Mr. Blake's guests at the moment of his seizure—mere recent acquaintances—when they found the calamity which had befallen him, conferred together, and undertook his case without hope of fee or reward; and several families who had

hitherto remained far aloof from intimacy with the rich merchant's wife, now in her distress showered on her delicate kindness and thoughtful attentions. I believe it is a law of human nature that it should be thus, and that we more often want a true friend in the garish noon-day of prosperity than we do in the bleak midnight of adversity. The one condition calls forth the clouds of envy to shroud the sunlight, and make heaven's canopy low; the other sweeps such racks away, and permits a hundred stars of pity, and kindness, and generous goodness to shine out of the darkness.

The permission to retain his household effects was certainly a great boon to the insolvent merchant, for they were of considerable value, and thus might afford a means of support until he could re-establish himself in business; but, as Mr. Basil Moore had observed, it was a concession with a very proper deduction—that of the goods not paid for. Swiftly, therefore, was the costly furniture which Mrs. Blake had ordered for her new house separated from the old, and carted away under the superintendence of the inspecting creditors; and the great house was

left dismantled of much that for a few miserable days had rendered it so gorgeous. The Aladdin's Palace had indeed faded away like a veritable fairy fabric; and now carpetless and curtainless rooms, with nails protruding to show where looking-glasses had been placed, and desolate tracks proclaiming where chairs and tables should stand, presented an aspect that dulled the spirits with a chilling sense of poverty, trouble, and disorder.

Already half the servants had been discharged, and the house was advertised to be let. As soon as it should be found prudent to remove Mr. Blake, it was intended to convey him to some suburban lodging; for to be taken anywhere, anywhere out of the track of former splendours and ephemeral acquaintances, and away from the spot associated with such miserable recollections, seemed the instinctive cry of both husband and wife. Meanwhile, half the rooms were shut up, and the sorrowful people who remained in the house moved about with something of the cautious tread that we involuntarily adopt in the presence of death.

A commonplace girl would not have participated in the trouble to the extent that

Agnes was capable of doing; although the ordinary worldly-minded young lady would probably have fretted over personal disappointments and petty discomforts a great deal more. Loss of fortune, however, is not the sort of trouble that greatly affects the young, for youth is in itself a fund of wealth, greater and brighter than gold. But it is a fund that only enriches the possessor, and Agnes was not sufficiently selfish to realise her own freedom from the chains that bound those around her. Moreover, she looked with a clear vision deep into the past, and far into the future; for there is a prophecy of the reason, as well as of inspiration. She saw how changed her mother's course of life must be—how changed her own. Clearly it was her immediate duty to set about earning her own living; and if she could but do this through the means of art, delight would mix largely with all her toil.

Agnes was rather ignorant of the methods by which to carry out her good intentions; but she had zeal, and to do almost anything seemed to her better than to sit with folded hands. Among Mr. Blake's possessions was an old picture by one of the Flemish masters,

which Agnes had often heard praised, and of which it was said no engraving had ever been taken. It occurred to her that a good copy of so valuable a picture might possibly find a purchaser, and she resolved to attempt the task. True, the subject was not one she would have selected for study, though she had sufficient knowledge to understand how ably it was treated. The picture represented a hideous old woman, in the garb of a fortune-teller; and a girl, dowered with the fresh beauty of youth, hanging with breathless interest on the witch-like creature's words. The outlines were free, yet accurate; the perspective was true, and therefore imposing in its effect—the colouring rich and mellow; and, as for finish and detail, the gazer might almost have counted the threads in the girl's kerchief; and the dirty pack of cards looked as if one of them might have been picked out by its corner.

Agnes had so often noticed the merits of this picture, that she thought she knew it by heart; and when she had descended to the desolate drawing-room, she arranged the light by opening one shutter, spread out her materials, and began to sketch in her outlines with

a free and steady hand. But Agnes was never intended to be a copyist of embodiments of thought with which she did not sympathise. As she studied her subject more closely, a dull sensation of distaste came over her; she worked more slowly, her attention flagged, and, at last, her mind wandered to the contemplation of how she herself would depict the erring desire of a young soul to pierce the future; and, as her mind strayed from her work, so did her hand. She found herself sketching an ideal head on her waste paper—a head which bore no manner of resemblance to either of those before her; and, instead of the pack of cards, a distaff, the thread of which was entangled by the thorns of a rose that had been pulled to pieces for the working of a spell.

Yet, it was but a ten minutes' distraction to which she yielded; and, as if relieved by it, she pursued her task diligently and laboriously. She was thus employed, when her mother, holding some letters in her hand, entered the room.

Mrs. Blake looked seven years older than she had done a few weeks before. She had grown so visibly thinner, that her clothes

hung loose about her, while her face was pale and wan, and her fine eyes seemed drawn back towards their sockets. It was also evident that she had recently shed tears; and when she spoke, her voice jarred with the irritable twang of one who is suffering much, but without being resigned to sorrow.

"Agnes," she exclaimed, "I have been looking everywhere for you: I really wonder you can be so unfeeling as to set about merely amusing yourself in this manner. What is it you are doing?"

"I am trying to copy The Fortune Teller," answered Agnes, in a tone which betrayed she was not insensible to her mother's reproach; "but I assure you, mamma, not exactly for my own amusement. I thought if I could succeed in making a tolerable copy, perhaps, some day, I might be able to sell it."

"Well, I don't know that it's a bad idea; and really, it is a blessing you have a talent for something. I am sure I wish now that I had taken Mr. Fairley's advice: if we had spent hundreds and thousands on you, it would have been all the same now."

"I am very thankful for the lessons I *have* had," said Agnes, cheered by the change in

her mother's manner, and sincerely feeling what she said; "and I hope I shall be able, with perseverance, to get my own living by painting; at least, I feel, dear mamma, that I ought to try."

"Well, I should think it would be better than governessing. There is Miss Mansfield —who, by-the-bye, has got another situation, and I want you to write a letter for me to the lady about her—Miss Mansfield, who is quite a blue-stocking—and Harry has got on in his Latin with her wonderfully—we only paid her forty pounds a-year, though, to be sure, she has now engaged herself for sixty. But, Agnes, I wanted to talk with you about going to Sutton."

"I had a letter from Philippa this morning," returned Agnes, "renewing the invitation; but while I can be of use at home, I think I ought not to go away."

"That is all very well, and of course you are of use; but Mrs. Sutton has written to me almost pleadingly on the subject, as if she had some mysterious scheme for your benefit; and saying that there is a home at Sutton Court for her daughter's friend, for as long as we will spare you. And, you see,

we are hoping to leave this horrid house in a week or two; and if we go into lodgings, or take a little cottage, we shall need one room less, if you are away. Julie, who has proved herself the best creature in the world, won't leave me, for she thinks she can do a great deal of needlework, and take care of Clarry, and wait upon me."

"I see—I see—I am not wanted," said Agnes, while a large tear rolled down her cheek; "and so I will write to Philippa and kind Mrs. Sutton, and say I am coming."

"I think, my dear, you had better do so. Really, Agnes, you are a good girl, and seem to look at things with the sense of a woman of thirty. I did think a day or two ago of writing to some of your father's connections about you; but when I remembered their treatment of me in former years, I found I could not do it. Besides, after all, they are only far-off relations, so that one cannot make out a claim."

"I am very glad, mamma, that you did not write, for I would much rather work than beg."

"Well, you need not use such strong language," replied Mrs. Blake, the old pettishness

returning, "you never were indebted to any of them. But as I was saying, if you are at Sutton we shall only want some quiet little place; as for Harry, everyone thinks it will be cheapest and best to send him to school; and till we can arrange where he shall go, Beta has promised to take charge of him. The truth is that something we have just heard makes it more and more necessary that we should save every penny."

"Nothing fresh, I hope, to distress papa, and make him worse!" exclaimed Agnes, with real anxiety.

"I believe it has distressed me much more than it has distressed him," returned Mrs. Blake; "but ever since his illness he has been so odd, there is no knowing what to tell him and what to hide from him. When he heard that Charles Farrell had got the Riga agency for himself, instead of being perfectly shocked and incensed as I was, he found a satisfaction in thinking that his nephew had such a good start in life, and that he had engaged one of the old clerks, who understood the business, to help him—a man who, perhaps, in all the troubles might have been thrown out of employ. I consider we have a positive claim

on Mr. Farrell, though I am a good deal too proud to ask anyone to help us till the last stick is gone. Then this morning comes the second surprise. As soon as the affairs of the firm are wound up, Mr. Simmonds is to be started in business on his own account, under the patronage of the creditors, who are petting him and favouring him in the most unjust manner. So you see he and Mr. Charles have broken the loaf between them, and my husband is to pick up the crumbs which have fallen in the fracture. Even you, child, can now understand how necessary it is for us to go into sixpenny lodgings.

"Poor papa—poor mamma! oh, that I could help you!" exclaimed Agnes, the tears now flowing freely, while the agitation of her feelings brought back to some extent her old infirmity; "but tell me, mamma," she continued, "is dear papa made worse by all this happening?"

"I don't know that he is. When he had read Mr. Simmonds' letter he shed tears, but they seemed rather a relief than otherwise. And he would not listen to a reproach of anybody, but said the creditors were quite right,

and that he did not wonder that they placed more confidence in Simmonds than they did in him. I am sure, to hear your papa talk of his regrets and repentance, one would think he was quite a criminal; instead of his having been purely unfortunate, and most cruelly treated. We really cannot help so many other people having suffered through the failure; it is quite enough to have to bear our own troubles, I think."

Agnes was silent, for she would not provoke discussion, and could not echo her mother's sentiments. Indeed, her heart yearned in sympathy with those emotions of her step-father, which seemed uncomprehended by his wife. So she proceeded, or tried to proceed, with her drawing.

"Really," continued Mrs. Blake looking over Agnes's shoulder, "really you have sketched that in very nicely. It is quite a relief to my mind that you can do something for your living—for with your impediment it would be difficult to be a good governess, and people might have a prejudice against taking you. There, don't turn red and white about it, I am sure it is not often I mention the subject. What I mean to say

is that it is most fortunate you have a talent which may make you independent, for, perhaps, now you will not have an opportunity of marrying well; and, oh! Agnes, whatever you do don't marry to poverty."

And Mrs. Blake turned to leave the room with a conviction that she had performed a mother's duty by giving a piece of wholesome advice, and wholly unconscious of the word-stabs she had inflicted. At the door she said, "Then you'll write to Sutton to say you can go next week?"

"Yes, mamma."

Poor Agnes! Her day was what "brain workers" call "broken." How could she paint with a hand that trembled from her conflicting feelings, or study her subject through the mists of fitful tears? or, worst of all, how could she, amid mental turmoil, gather Thought into that calm focus of strength, by which alone an artist's inherent power should be guaged? Agnes was not of a vain nature, therefore she could not supply herself with any of the mental stimulants with which vanity is always provided. Whatever self-reliance she might have possessed, had always come at the call of reason,

and now that she found herself drawing badly, and incapable of executing a task which had seemed to her at first almost easy, she was seized with a horrible depression and distrust of her own powers. Temporary distrust and depression, of course, but bitter enough while they lasted.

Perhaps, after all, broken hopes and broken days are but the bricks to form a pedestal, on which some completed work shall ultimately rest. Well is it when the pedestal is not too pyramidal—too massive—for the dwarfed object it may finally sustain.

"Any letters, Miss Agnes?" said a servant entering the drawing-room late in the afternoon; "it is nearly post time."

"In a few minutes they will be ready—I did not think it was so late."

Agnes had been dissatisfied with her first letter to Sutton, and was writing another.

CHAPTER II.

THE CHILD'S QUESTION ANSWERED NOW.

"And hope could never hope too much
In watching thee from hour to hour."
IN MEMORIAM.

"BUT, Jackson, how is this?—I asked you to take a second-class ticket for me."

The speaker was Agnes Bendoran, the scene the railway terminus at Euston Square.

"It is quite right, Miss," replied Jackson, who had been her escort from home; "the second-class carriages are likely to be crowded, so I have managed for you to have a first-class ticket, though you have only paid second-class price—you see that by the change, Miss."

"How very odd—I don't understand—"

"If you please, Miss Agnes, let me show you where the luggage is," interrupted the old

servant; "I don't think there is much time to lose;" and as he spoke he hurried her forward, and was rather fussy in pointing out the exact position of her various packages. As Agnes had never before travelled alone, and as she was taking with her to Sutton Court the whole of her little personal possessions, Jackson's precaution was a very wise one.

"Now, Miss Agnes, let me see you into the carriage: there is one with two ladies in it, who are going all the way—that will be pleasanter than with many changes of companions. Parasol, shawl, cloak, and little bag, four articles in the carriage with you—an easy number to remember."

"You are very kind and thoughtful for me, Jackson," said Agnes, not without a trembling of her voice; "and I cannot say good-bye to you without saying what a consolation it is to me to know you are going to remain with papa and mamma."

"Miss Agnes, I couldn't leave my master for strangers to lift him, and help him about, —no, not if you were to pay me for doing it. Wages are no object now. I have taken wages enough for five-and-twenty years."

"God bless you, Jackson!" exclaimed Agnes, holding out her hand, and leaving it for a minute in the old servant's sturdy grasp.

These words were spoken near the carriage door, either to the edification or the mystification of Agnes's fellow-passengers. But after she had taken her seat, and just as the train was about to start, the truth of how she came to be travelling thus luxuriously flashed suddenly through her mind.

"Oh, Jackson!" she exclaimed, leaning towards him from the window, "I understand about the ticket. Thank you—thank you."

"Don't be angry, Miss Agnes," replied Jackson, colouring, as if convicted of some terrible fault. "It would make me miserable for you to be angry just at the last moment. I wouldn't have done it, if I had thought you could have known it."

"Good-by—good-by—and thank you for all your trouble and kindness;" and, as the huge, reptile-like train began to crawl forward, as if trying and feeling its strength, Agnes leaned back in her seat, and, despite the presence of strangers, gave way to her tears.

Was she weeping for wounded dignity at the thought that an old servant had paid part

of her fare? No, her pride was not of the sort that had felt any wound on the present occasion. Her eyes brimmed at the consciousness of the kindness which she had received. Verily, she was a homeless orphan girl—but yet she was going as a cherished guest to hearts that loved her; and the last incident associated with her departure from London was linked with a memory of protecting kindness and devotion. Happily, she was not too proud to be grateful.

It was the first week in September, and by the time London lay like a receding shadow in the distance, Agnes was sufficiently composed to feel enjoyment in the fresh morning air, and the pleasant country scenery. The breeze that fluttered her bonnet-strings seemed to bring health and cheerfulness on its wings, while there was something in the autumnal scenery that harmonised with the mood of her mind. It was not a bright, garish day, but, for that very reason, the varied tints of the landscape were revealed in all their perfection. The high, fleecy, veiling clouds mellowed the light, and shed an air of repose over the earth. And yet it was a repose perpetually broken by man's labour. The season

had been late, so that in some districts farmers, ricks were still in process of building; in others fruit trees were being stripped of their ruddy burthens; further on, the brown earth was being torn by plough or harrow; and then green pastures were dotted by sleek cattle. Through such scenes of rural life did the snorting iron steed still trail its hundreds of followers; a multitude committed to the strength of the subtle and struggling vapour, that was itself overruled by mind!

Through tunnels and over bridges, by the road side, athwart rich meadows, past towns and villages—it was the same line she had often travelled before, and the familiar stations, or well-known bits of scenery, called up hosts of memories of former days. Even a sportsman's gun, heard more than once above the din and jar of the train, was not without its associations. Agnes began to experience a common sensation, yet one she had never before attempted to analyse, or indeed had recognised with such intensity. It was the vivid feeling of her own individuality, as a living atom of the wide, wide world; an atom which, wherever it was wafted, must still carry about with it its personal burthen of care.

She seemed to have grown strangely older within the last few weeks; and in coming far away from her sad home, her portion of its sadness still clung to her memory.

It was about four o'clock when she reached the station at which she must alight; and there was Philippa with the pony carriage waiting for her friend. Philippa had begged hard that hers might be the first greeting, and had carried her point; and in a few minutes Agnes was seated by her side; and with a groom on horseback, and another servant driving a dog-cart that contained the luggage, the little cavalcade was soon in motion. The pair of spirited ponies knew Philippa's light hand on the reins, and knew the modulations of her voice, and it was always a pretty sight to see her driving. She was what people call "an excellent whip," for, indeed, all sorts of equine knowledge came to her by a sort of instinct; but her graceful *petite* person, and thorough womanliness of gesture, prevented her from ever looking masculine. The little well-gloved fingers guided the reins just as easily and naturally as the same fingers were accustomed to glide over the keys of the piano; and, though the ponies kept up a rattling

pace, which promised to "do" the five miles in half-an-hour, every turn was happily made, every lumbering vehicle on the road dexterously passed, without the slightest let or hindrance of the rapid talk in which dear friends newly met are apt to indulge.

Yet once, for an instant, the ponies swerved from their course, as if their guide had momentarily lost the control; but this happened when they were within half-a-mile of the house, and in the long avenue which led thereto. But so quickly did Philippa recover herself, that Agnes scarcely noticed the circumstance; and the next moment they received a bow from the gamekeeper, who had perhaps startled the steeds, and Agnes perceived three young sportsmen at a little distance, plodding their way somewhat wearily to the house. Yet, tired or not, Edgar Sutton and his friend Arthur Rivingstone lingered about the doorway, to hand Philippa and her guest out of the pony-chaise.

With her accustomed cordiality, but not with extra demonstration that could point to the occasion as one of patronage and protection, did Mrs. Sutton receive her visitor. But when Agnes was proceeding to the cham-

ber—rather a small room—which she had usually occupied when at Sutton, Philippa said—

"No, not that little room—you are to be next to me, with the windows looking to the garden. There is a door between the two rooms, which we can leave unlocked, so we shall be quite cosey."

Agnes knew the room. It was one of the pleasantest in the house. And hardly had she taken off her bonnet, when there was a light tap at the door, and a neat waiting-maid presented herself, saying, with a curtsey—

"I am to wait on you, Miss Bendoran, if you please. Shall I unpack your boxes, and help you to dress? Mrs. Sutton said I was to consider myself your maid."

Only by delicate tokens like these was the greeting of Agnes, under changed circumstances, marked. The dinner that day passed off as many former dinners at Sutton Court had done, except that, perhaps, the youthful element in the circle was more apparent than it had been a year before. The younger members of the family were just at that age when every six months show, or should show, rapid development of thought and cha-

racter—consequently, they talked more, and expressed more decided opinions than formerly. Then Arthur Rivingstone was an eloquent speaker for so young a man; and, though Agnes was habitually quiet and taciturn, her expressive countenance always credited her with more speech than had actually passed her lips.

Indeed, at that table, that day, three out of the seven ages of man were very beautifully represented. Old Mr. Johnstone, the patriarch of the party, was a representative type of the grand Old English Gentleman; and because his great expansive nature had never worn out that freshness, which drops from common clay often in its teens, he retained a respect for youth, that was just as graceful as the respect youth involuntarily tendered him. That is to say, noble youth—youth unchilled, uncorrupted by the world's sordidness—for he had always a generous sympathy with the aspirations, the magnanimities of them who are the heirs

"of all the ages in the foremost files of time;"

and because he gave them sympathy, he acquired over them influence, and received reverence.

His daughter, Mrs. Sutton, and her husband, in the bright summer of their days, were hardly less favourable types of a fleeting generation.

"May I come to your sanctum presently for a little while?" said Agnes to Mrs. Sutton, two days after her arrival.

"Certainly, my dear," was the reply; "indeed, I wanted to have a little talk with you. Come now."

But when Agnes found herself seated in the well-known room, so full of pleasant associations, the words that had seemed so ready on her lips were driven back. Mrs. Sutton, however, perceived her emotion; and, taking her hand, said, calmly and kindly—

"What is it?"

The calmness communicated itself, in some measure, to Agnes, and she was able to speak her thought, coming at once to the point.

"Dear Mrs. Sutton," she exclaimed, "do not think me ungrateful; but I must not stay here very long."

"Why not?" asked Mrs. Sutton, though without any tone of surprise.

"Because your goodness and kindness

would unnerve my resolutions, and each day I should feel it more difficult to carry out my own good intentions. You and Mr. Sutton treat me as if I were your child; and Philippa, as if I were her sister. I am afraid of myself—afraid of forgetting who I am, and that it is my duty to work for my living."

"Do you mean, my dear Agnes, that you refuse to consider this as your home?"

"Oh! no, no, no! It is my greatest happiness to feel I have such friends, and such a home. I am not too proud to accept any favour at your hands; and the favour I have to ask of you is, that you will shew me the way—help me to the way, of earning my own living. These late troubles are even deeper and darker than you know; and it is most likely that I shall have to work for others in the end, as well as for myself."

"You are a noble girl!" said Mrs. Sutton, passing her arm round Agnes's waist; "and I am proud to call you my second daughter. Well, you shall be made happy in your own way."

"Kind, kind friend!"

"Now, listen to a little story that I have to tell you: it is the easier to relate, now that I

know your mind so thoroughly. You have heard us speak of Lady Isabella Clinton?"

"Often—often."

"Lady Isabella is deeply interested in you, and she offers you protection in her Italian home, with all possible opportunities of prosecuting your Art studies."

Sometimes a simple suggestion—a thought that is conveyed in a brief phrase—presents to the mind which receives it a sequence of circumstances—a panorama-like view of events. It was thus with Agnes on the present occasion. A half-articulate cry of delight escaped her, and she clasped her hands tightly together, as if to restrain a too violent demonstration of her feelings.

"What goodness of Lady Isabella!" exclaimed Agnes, after that momentary pause; "but, dear Mrs. Sutton, she does it for your sake."

"No, Agnes, not for my sake."

And as Mrs. Sutton spoke, a faint and serious smile rippled over her countenance.

"You puzzle me," said Agnes. "I cannot guess the riddle."

"Will it help you, my dear, if I tell you that *I* was first led to notice *you*, when you

were a little child, by wishing to love you for Lady Isabella's sake?"

"Dear Mrs. Sutton, you only make the puzzle more intricate."

"I thought it would be so. Well, it devolves on me to tell you a little love-story. But, you know, I am not one of the mammas who think a subject that is, with most women, a vital influence, is never to be talked of to young girls."

"If all mothers were thus wise," ejaculated Agnes, "perhaps there would be less sorrow among their daughters!"

"It is not so much wisdom that is in the case, as courage and sincerity."

"Grand qualities, that almost are wisdom!"

"Why, Agnes, you are quite philosophic! And I think what my husband said of you last night is true, and that you have sprung from the child to the woman at one bound."

"Did Mr. Sutton say that of me?"

"Something like it."

"It is true that lately I have felt quite old;" and as she spoke, Agnes looked at her friend with much seriousness.

Mrs. Sutton smiled at the seriousness, and rejoined,—

"The young always think they are feeling old directly the real lessons of life press on them with individual experiences. I think the first season of real youth, when life is utterly fresh and new, is hardly longer than a butterfly's existence. But take my word for it, Agnes, the second youth, the youth which comes after knowledge, is a much more precious term."

Agnes was silent. Not yet was she able to comprehend the wealth of this second youth.

"But, to proceed to the story I promised to tell," continued Mrs. Sutton. "Agnes, it may startle you to hear that Lady Isabella Clinton loved your father, and was betrothed to him in early life."

"My own dear father!" exclaimed Agnes, as if unable, in a moment, to receive this new idea.

"Yes, Captain George Bendoran, the handsome and accomplished young soldier, who, however, preferred your mother, and, as you are aware I know, eloped with her; thereby offending his rich uncle, who had set his mind on the marriage with Lady Isabella. Old General Bendoran, who loved her almost as if she were his own child, bequeathed to her a

portion of the fortune he had intended for your father."

"I am glad of that," said Agnes emphatically; "for though money could not be a substitute for love, Lady Isabella is so wise, that money in her hands must always be a power for good."

"Just so," replied Mrs. Sutton; "and the fact is exemplified on the present occasion. She is wise, and good, and tolerably rich; she desires you to be acquainted with the particulars I have stated, being thoroughly assured that you will feel—as she does—that your relation to one another is something too sacred for the world to have any part therein. By the love she bore your father, she asks you to accept love and service from her."

During the latter part of this discourse, Agnes had slipped to a stool at Mrs. Sutton's feet, and leaning her head like a tired child on her friend's lap, the tears now flowed freely.

"I am certain that your mother will offer no objection. What am I to say for answer?" continued Mrs. Sutton, smoothing Agnes's bright hair with a tender caress.

"Say to Lady Isabella that I already love her," murmured Agnes, "and that I feel as if there were something of my father throbbing at my heart, and trying to thank her."

CHAPTER III.

FIRE-SIDE TALK.

"Wisdom and goodness to the vile seem vile."

LEAR.

I CONFESS to thinking that a young heart without its romance—either in fact or imagination—is as mournful an object as a stunted barren tree that for all the May sunshine puts forth no bud nor blossom, and is only saved from the axe by the faintest possible show of vitality. Certainly, Agnes Bendoran's nature was not of this sapless sort; but it really seemed that the subject of Love was to be pressed upon her thoughts just now from more directions than one.

The story of Lady Isabella's faithful, but ill-requited attachment sank deep into the heart of Agnes, graving there a deathless memory

which gathered round it many tender fancies and grateful resolves, and was the springing point of new and noble aspirations. It was well for her, in fact, to have her mind in some degree lifted out of the sordid cares which had lately hedged her round; but it was not only a tale of the past that was to occupy and interest her. Before she had been many hours at Sutton Court, she was conscious that Philippa and the guest Arthur Rivingstone were something more or less than friends. Yet they could not be acknowledged lovers, for Philippa behaved to him with a haughtiness and occasional caprice, which a man only tolerates before he is sure of his prize. Agnes was pained and puzzled at this manner —it was so unlike the usual transparent sincerity of her friend; and as for attributing it to coquetry, that was impossible, for Philippa was too proud, too true, too earnest to use the weapon with which vain and unscrupulous women often contrive to win for themselves pleasant places in life. The coquette oftenest rules her adorers. Alas, the woman devoid of coquetry is very likely to be herself a slave!

Not that Agnes reasoned thus. She was far too ignorant of life to have arrived at any

such conclusions; and her knowledge was but from the instinctive teachings of her own heart.

Her own heart! that had awakened to a knowledge of itself—that had its secret decently composed, laid out like a corpse in grave-clothes, and guarded by many sentinels. Hush! let the flowers that deck the bier lie there undisturbed—they will not fade in the soft air of memory's chamber; and if the corpse-like figure should not be dead—should only be in death-like slumber, or trance filled up with fairy visions—why the flowers may serve for garlands on the awakening. Only she will forbid herself to believe in this awakening—will resolutely recognise her love for a corpse embalmed—not corrupted.

The meeting with Edgar Sutton, under all the changed circumstances of her life, had made her sure of the truth which had been whispering itself to her soul ever since she had emerged from childhood. It is nonsense to talk of love in young hearts being an "unconscious" emotion—and nonsense of the worst sort, because its falsity leads to much false shame. Love is too mighty a conqueror to war unsuspected—too despotic a sovereign

to sit on a throne unrecognised. Agnes, accustomed as she was by the habit of her life to self-examination, self-control, and self-abnegation, knew perfectly well that the brother of her friend was the dearest object to her on earth; but at the same time she felt intuitively that Duty was calling her to walk in another path than that of a girlish bride, or even betrothed maiden. She knew that the Suttons looked forward to Edgar entering on a career, and years passing before he thought of marriage; and had Mr. Blake's prosperity continued, it is possible that years might have glided away in the frequent happy intercourse between these young hearts, till the vague understanding, which in these latter months had been tacitly acknowledged between them, grew into the dearest and strongest bond of human life.

But this could not now be. Agnes could not requite the generous friendship she had received from Edgar's parents by linking with his life the sorrows and cares that were tangled round her own. Thus, from the hour of her arrival at Sutton Court she had felt that dear abode must be but a temporary rest, and had spoken of her own future, whenever there

was fitting occasion so to speak, as a future that must be devoted to Art and Labour. Every true woman comprehends perfectly well how possible it is to make a purpose and resolve, such as Agnes entertained, thoroughly apparent without set speeches, or any indulgence in "scenes" little or great; and after her eventful conversation with Mrs. Sutton her course was even more clear and definite.

It was a chilly evening later in the month, when the autumn seemed beckoning to the advancing winter, which answered the appeal with gusts of wind that brought down the sear leaves from the trees in whirling showers, and by sloping rain that pattered against the windows as if the drops were solid pellets. Everyone knows how enjoyable in such weather is a crackling, blazing fire—especially if it be the first of the season; and after dinner the friendly family-party at Sutton drew round the drawing-room fire, with a thoroughly English sort of enjoyment. Even the piano, the usual evening resource, was deserted, and conversation, springing from some unnoticed germ of thought, grew animated and interesting. Mr. Sutton was advocating the dignity

of labour, and letting in some new lights on that subject to the mind of his elder son.

"But there must be a class of people," said Godfrey, "and a pretty numerous class too, who inherit leisure as a right, and to blame them for not working is really quite democratic."

"My dear Godfrey," replied his father, "I believe that often misused epithet may rightly apply to my sentiments. Yet, don't be frightened; I would not rob any class of its leisure—rather would I bestow on all classes an increased amount of it. It would be the way to get better and more work from the world in general."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know any such test of a man as the manner in which he employs his leisure. I am not speaking of those brief snatches of rest which the hard-worker is justified in using in whatever harmless idle way may best serve to restore his exhausted powers; but of the period which follows upon rest, and which is leisure properly so called. In such a condition the mind springs forward to follow its strongest impulse, and recovering something of the instinct trodden down by over-civilization, and the

tyranny of custom, reveals its true nature and inclinations."

"That is what I have often felt," observed Arthur Rivingstone; "I don't believe in the fascinations of idleness, though I have been called an idle fellow more often than most people. I know well enough what it is to shirk uncongenial employment, but then one often does it to get at some much harder work that one loves."

"The labour we delight in physics pain," observed Edgar.

"A clear sense of duty can alone tell us when such 'shirking' is allowable," returned Mr. Sutton with a smile, and not noticing the trite quotation.

"But, father," interposed Edgar, "pray discourse a little on my text; I need a justification of idleness more than Arthur does."

"And that you will never get from any Shaksperian text."

"But, dear papa," chimed in with mother-tone the voice of Mrs. Sutton, "what if people only employ their leisure in selfish indulgence, seeking new pleasures and amusements as the old ones fail, and never 'doing' a thing that

can make the world richer or better—what of those who squander their leisure thus vainly?"

"No less truly," returned Mr. Sutton, "in such cases is the real nature tested and proved. And at any rate it is a great gain for the world to know its capables from its incapables, its working producing bees from its idle consuming drones. It is a huge drawback on our much-vaunted progress, that the whole machinery of modern life has a tendency to nip and clip the vigorous shoots of character, which, if only pruned and trained by common sense, might have developed into rich and marked individuality. I have seen in a northern orchard a score of trees cut off, just where the mountain wind broke over the protecting wall, and ever unable to bud and blossom above the one height; but who can doubt that if they had been favourably placed, with gentler breezes circling round about them, those same trees, instead of being stunted to one low level, would have stretched forth their laden branches in various and unimagined forms of beauty? There are cold blasts of conventionalism that are as bitter to originality

of character, as an icy wind to the fruit blossoms."

"I see the force of your simile," said Rivingstone.

"*You* may," resumed Mr. Sutton, "but very few of this young locomotive generation, who esteem beyond all privileges that of having been born towards the middle of the nineteenth century,—very few young men, I say, are at all cognizant of the obscurer tendencies of the age. As a necessity of existence they must travel twenty or thirty miles an hour; but to do so they do not order their own steeds and choose their own roads—be they highways or by-ways—or their own time for the journey; no, they congregate at some hour appointed for the general convenience, and they travel in a train along the straight iron road, all meeting with nearly the same incidents, hearing the same shrill whistles, and sustaining very similar jerks. Everything in modern life tends to running in a groove; and can we wonder that character is so often dragged forward or backward to the convenient mediocrity. Railway travelling is but the type of many facts acting themselves out, round about us."

"And a very ugly type too," said Edgar Sutton. "I have always doubted the divinity of Steam since I first remarked the extreme ugliness of every appurtenance of his godship. You may laugh," he continued, observing the visible effect of his words, "but I mean what I say. If you don't see the direction of my thought at once, I am afraid I should have to talk for an hour before I could clear away the brushwood. Yet let me give you a little illustration of my fancy. I take it that a fine Gothic cathedral embodies about the grandest creative thought of which the human mind has as yet been found capable. In such a production, human genius stands on tiptoe, aspiring to reach the heavens. If time and rapine should have done cruel work, and left but a ruin remaining, broken columns and divided arches still preserve or suggest the graceful lines which tender moss or the sheltering ivy loves to follow; even if destruction should have dealt its last blow and razed the fabric to the ground, the 'thing of beauty' is still eternal. All the souls, through the many generations who have received its effluence, have been made the richer—and the riches of the mind bequeath themselves in thought

or action to the future, more certainly than worldly wealth was ever entailed. Thus, I say, the creations of art and beauty are eternal in their influences, while the things pertaining to science are as changeable or perishable as the dead matter with which they mostly deal."

"I wonder what our great engineers, our masters of machinery, and our modern men of science would say to such doctrines?" exclaimed Godfrey, with something of derision in his tone.

"I should little regard their thoughts and opinions," returned Edgar, "except as the expression of them might discover the joints and weak parts of that armour of prejudice in which for the most part such persons move. I am not speaking of the magnates of their order, because they, with hardly an exception, have shone as something brighter than great luminaries of science. Davy was a poet as well as a chemist—and Newton's famous 'shell gathering' comparison is as a flash which shows us for a moment the recesses of his mind, its wide imaginings, and lowly reverence for things greater than the demonstrable or tangible."

"You are a little too hard, my dear boy, on the mere men of science," said Mr. Sutton, "though in the main I believe your view is the right one."

"For my part," exclaimed Godfrey, "I don't see what good the dreamers and enthusiasts have done in the world. Whereas, we can prove and test how much we are indebted to the exact science of the age, in all that relates to modern progress."

"That horrid phrase!" returned Edgar; "if there be two words that I should wish to keep apart, they are 'modern' and 'progress,' for the perpetual use of that cant phrase is filling the popular mind with conceit and false notions. And as for the 'exact' sciences, every day's experience is proving that they may be the most inexact of all. Many scientific books of fifty years ago, are but a snare and delusion to the young student—whereas the soul-truths which the poets show us, are truths for ever. In fancy we sail swiftly up the stream of time, and think of Chaucer, Dante, Homer; their truths are truths still, with nothing to improve or unlearn."

"Go farther, Edgar," said his mother, "ascend to the Hebrew poetry of Holy Writ."

"Which is the very fountain of all, gushing fresh from the hearts of the inspired Vates. Not for a light cause is the great Hebrew bard shown to us as a King—for Poets are still of the only Royal Lineage;" and as Edgar spoke, his face kindled with enthusiasm.

"And painters?" said Philippa enquiringly, and longing for some expression that should dignify the present position of her dear friend.

"The Painter, if truly deserving the name, is of course a Poet. Poetry and painting, music, sculpture, and architecture, all that make what we call the arts, must spring from those who rule by a divine right. I know very well that some of the arts, music especially, may be reduced to a science; but is not this fact an exemplification of the sometimes-forgotten truism—that the greater must include the lesser? There may be science without creative art—but true art always includes science. The music that through many generations has floated down to us on the wave of popular love, first broke on the ear as an expression of the thought and fancy that glowed in the

composer's soul,—we try it by the test of science, and find it true."

"Of course," said Arthur Rivingstone, following out the thought of his friend; "but if, on the other hand, you were to instil the science of music into the clearest mind, in which the poetical faculty was deficient, you would never be the richer by one musical idea. Science can but combine—it is Art that creates."

"How grateful the world ought to be to all who enrich it by their labour," said Mrs. Sutton.

"It is so noble a privilege to be able thus to work," exclaimed Rivingstone, "that I think great thinkers and great doers can dispense with human gratitude."

"Did it ever strike you," said Edgar, "that there is something symbolic in the fact that our lifted hands stretch nearer to heaven than even the thoughtful brow?"

"Truly it is an emblem," said Mr. Sutton, "and I think our dear young artist might work out the idea by means of an allegorical figure."

"Agnes," cried Mrs. Sutton, "there is a commission for you, recognise and accept it as such."

"My first," said Agnes, and playfully taking out her pocket-book, she made a mock entry. She did not need a written memorandum for such a fancy emanating from such a source.

"And what of the Soldier?" remarked Arthur Rivingstone, after a brief pause, and addressing Mr. Sutton as if some deep interest hung upon his elder friend's judgment and opinion—"what of the Soldier? Do you think it possible for him to be a great doer, especially in these times of peace? or is there any truth in the teachings of a certain school which declares that the soldier is rather an unmaker and instrument of destruction than anything else?"

"I suspect," returned Mr. Sutton, "that there never was a party that succeeded in attracting even a small number of followers that had not in its teachings some elements of truth; but a half-truth, or a truth only half seen, is very nearly as mischievous as falsehood. Depend upon it, until the reign of spiritual peace takes place on earth, we shall want the soldier—the Cornelius-like devout soldier, who knows himself enlisted to obtain, or maintain, lawful freedom and righteous

order, by means of which, even particles of real peace can alone exist in this confused and sin-spoilt world. I for one look upon the brave and tender, the wise and true—in a word, the Christian soldier, with profound reverence."

"You do!" ejaculated Rivingstone, in the glad tone that indicates a weight has been lifted from the heart—"you do! then I may hope that you will sympathise with my aspirations, not deprecate my purpose, should I enter the army."

"You enter the army!"

"Yes, the often-expressed wish of my grandfather, which, however, I had thought long since faded away, seems lately to have revived with added force; in recent letters he entreats instead of commands, and overrules every difficulty and objection."

"You should have decided a year or two ago, should you not?" said Mrs. Sutton, whose cheek had somewhat faded while Arthur was speaking.

"Yes; but my grandfather has great influence at the Horse Guards, as perhaps is rightly due to his long Peninsular services, and my being so nearly of age is not to be

made an objection. For my own part, I hope not to be the worse soldier because I have spent a year or two in learning to know and love Homer."

"And in some other studies and pursuits not too common among mere military men," said Edgar.

"Comply with your grandfather's wish," exclaimed Mr. Sutton, stretching out his hand to Arthur, "unless some stricter duty to your own soul forbids and prevents compliance. After all our discourse about the dignity of labour, you must see what an advance in life it is for you to have a profession and enter on a career."

CHAPTER IV.

A CONFESSION.

"But for the general award of love,
The little sweet doth kill much bitterness."
KEATS.

SOME six-and-twenty hours had passed away since the fireside talk I have attempted to describe. A night wakeful to more than one inmate of Sutton Court; a day that had seemed to the outer senses to have glided by on Time's smoothest wheels, but which, in at least one young soul, had made dents durable as the writing cut in a rock.

After the rain and storm of the preceding evening there had shone forth a soft and mellow autumn day; a day delicious for riding or driving, and for sauntering on polished gravel-paths, which again looked thirsty, as if

desiring the drops that a few overhanging boughs still had to scatter. Everyone had spent many hours out of doors, and natural had it been to yield to those mystic attractions which so often lead to a half-intended, half-accidental *tête-à-tête*. Philippa and Arthur, lingering in the rear of their companions, had walked all round the shrubbery twice, perhaps thrice—she holding a dark red rose in her hand, which, when she lifted it to her face, hid the tremor of her lips. Poor rose! Did it draw life or death from the quick, uneven breathings of Philippa Sutton, that it should so soon pass out of sight? No flower of its hue was dropped on the gravel-path that afternoon, and no dark-red rose drooped from Philippa's girdle for many long days to come.

Dinner-time had come and gone; and if some of the party were a shade quieter than usual, perhaps others talked the more, so the balance was struck; and hardly a straw on the surface of polished society showed tokens of the currents which were still controlling it. After dinner there had been but little general conversation, for the gentlemen had deserted the drawing-room to play billiards, and in-

stead of indulging in music, the ladies had drawn out their embroidery.

It was night, in fact past midnight, and guests and hosts had long since separated. Agnes had been an hour in her chamber, but had not yet retired to rest. It chanced that she had been little alone that day, and there was a refreshment to her in this period of calm reflection. Then it happened to be a night of surpassing beauty. She had drawn up a window-blind to look out on the loveliness of the scene, and the light of the full moon so flooded the room that she extinguished her candles, and sat by the casement indulging in reverie. No sense of drowsiness oppressed her; on the contrary, she felt the truth that night was not "sent" only "for slumber." There are voices too soft to be heard in the jar of the working-hours, and fancies too fine to have shape in the garish sunlight; but the voices tell truth, and the fancies are thoughts of pearl-like purity. They come in the shade and the silence; let us keep their memory through the glare of the morrow.

The shadows of the fine old trees were creeping eastward, and still Agnes gazed, the scene associating itself with the recollections

of her heart. Past and present seemed to mingle, and never before had the inner and the outer of her young life seemed so entwined. In truth, she was just now separating herself from that first period of pupilage, when the young, controlled by their elders, controlled by circumstances, exercise little free-will except in the region of mind. Henceforth, she would have to choose in matters of fact and matters of action, and the "inner" must of necessity find itself closely pressed on by the "outer" of existence. Presently, a shadow too flickering for a cloud obscured the moonlight, and, looking up, Agnes perceived a flock of swallows stretched out like a banner, and speeding southwards.

"I follow—I follow," thought Agnes, "and I will take this sight as an omen to flee southward now at the right season; for I go that I may shun a winter of the heart, and of the mind. At least I may bask in the sunshine of art, and of something warmer than moonlight, in this generous regard of my unknown friend."

And, so thinking, Agnes Bendoran adjusted the blind and curtain to darken her chamber, and prepared for the rest that should garner her strength for thought and action.

But the darkness revealed to her a bright line of light beneath the door which communicated with Philippa's room; and, as she passed near the spot, she was arrested by a sound of low wailing. It was a sound quite different from ordinary weeping—something more like the involuntary sob of a creature worn by pain. Agnes listened for a moment, and then becoming anxious for her friend, knocked gently at the door. There was no response; but the next moment the light grew stronger, as if from the brightening of a flame, and, as the sobbing still continued, Agnes boldly opened the door.

Her anxiety about the flame was soon relieved, for she saw at once from what the sudden glare had proceeded. One of the candles belonging to Philippa's looking-glass had already died out, and the other, sinking in its socket, was making an expiring flare from its accumulated droppings of wax.

But Philippa Sutton was absorbed by some dread anguish, and had neither heeded the flickering light nor her friend's low tap at the door. Gathered in a white heap, she half reclined on a couch near the bed, her rich dark hair streaming about her, as if she had

sought to make of it a veil. Yet she perceived the entrance of Agnes, and a look almost of anger passed for an instant across her face. The next moment the bitter feeling was subdued, and she lifted her hand with a gesture that encouraged Agnes to approach. The taper died out, and only the moonbeams struggled through the window-curtains, as Agnes folded Philippa in her arms, and, resting the throbbing head upon her shoulder, murmured between fond kisses—"Philippa!—darling!"

The sufferer accepted such caresses as if they calmed her, and for many minutes lay almost as passive as a sleeping child. Then, raising her head, and opening her eyes as if to bathe them in the shade, she said, with a tremour of pain—

"He thinks I do not love him!"

"How so?" murmured Agnes, who needed not to question of the "he," or of the state of Philippa's heart.

"My pride—my pride—my wicked pride, that has been more cruel to myself than it can have been to him!" And again the poor girl sobbed and wailed, though with Agnes's arms wound about her.

"Why did he talk with such praise of the dignity of toil, as if that way to reconcile me to my lowly birth?" she continued, springing up, and seeking to avenge herself by finding a flaw in him she loved. "Why did he speak of the likelihood of lands and title passing from himself? and of our wealth as something to be mated equally? Why did he so well mask with earnestness such mockery?"

"Not mockery," murmured Agnes; "he is not one to mock."

"Such things are always mockery to me, though you, who are well born, may not understand my feelings."

"Well born!—oh, Philippa, think of your mother, so truly noble—of your father blessing you daily—of mine, a dull, childish memory. Oh, Philippa, no one ever guessed you had this yearning for a shadow!"

"Yes, there is one who has more than guessed—my grandfather, who was my sponsor. He told me one day that he had erred in giving me the name of a queen; and the tone and the look with which he spoke crimsoned my forehead, and made me know he had read me through."

"Oh, Philippa!" sighed Agnes, "this is

folly—folly. How would you have had him who loves you woo?"

"How? Not humbly, but with a pride that, twining with my pride, should have made our two lives inextricable. I would have had him take my hand tightly in his, and feel, if not say something like this—'I know this little hand takes shape, comely as it is, from hands which delved, and wove, and spun—which touched the cap with reverence, or plied the needle diligently—while my circling fingers are warm with the blood of kings and heroes; but I love you, Philippa, and my love is great and strong enough to lift you to my side, to sit there, my chosen one.' Kings did thus in the old heroic times —why should not he?"

"People say those old heroic times were very barbarous times," sighed Agnes.

"All times yet have been barbarous times in one sense or another," cried Philippa; "but I do not believe any worship was ever more barbarous and ignorant than the money-worship of to-day. Oh, to think that *he* was considering my probable riches, and his own possible poverty, and that these considerations encumbered his speech, and made him hesitate

and falter, and want the word of help I was too proud to utter. He should have known that was not the way to seek me—he should have known I despised riches, and was jealous and suspicious of being valued for them!"

And the excited girl drooped her head, and burst into a fresh passion of tears.

"If he had thought you a money-worshipper," said Agnes, "he with his precarious prospects would not have wooed you at all; and, more than that, Mr. Rivingstone has a nature too noble to have loved you had you been thus mean."

"Thank you, Agnes. You do me good now."

"Darling Phil," said her friend, soothingly, "surely this is only a misunderstanding, and five minutes to-morrow will make everything right."

"A misunderstanding—yes; but nothing I know of can undo what has passed. I craved so eagerly that he should speak in the way my heart wanted—his soul to my soul, without that wall of worldly matters between us, that I was dumb when I ought to have spoken—choked with the rush of feelings he did not comprehend; and when that torrent

somewhat abated, there sprang forth the wrong words—words that seemed born of indifference or ill-temper, when they were only the coinage of suppressed anguish. And so I agreed with him that it would be right and wise to defer marriage proposals till he should be secure of title and estates, or definitely reduced to the commoner's lowlier condition; that it was expedient, as well as his duty, to comply with his grandfather's wish, and enter the army immediately, so as at all hazards to make for himself a career. Finally, I offered him good wishes, in proper set phrases, and when he kissed my hand at parting, he never saw that my heart—my life—were lying at his feet, entreating to be lifted and cherished."

"But surely, dear Philippa, it is not too late. A single word might awaken him to the truth, if you would only let dear Mrs. Sutton help you with her advice."

"What! my sweet, good mother! who, wise as she is, knows no more of my strange, tangled pride, than—than—you did an hour ago. No, no, she cannot help me. And recollect, Agnes, that I have *given* you my confidence, and that you must never, never, betray it. When you came into my room, I

was not obliged to tell you my trouble. You understand—that I have chosen to confide in you." And with the last words Philippa pressed her friend's wrist so tightly, that the clasp was almost painful.

"I understand," replied Agnes calmly; "and, with God's help, I will be as true to you as, were our cases reversed, you would be to me. Oh, Philippa, that you could use my love, as well as trust it!"

"I tell you, Agnes, that no earthly friend can help me. My own fault has brought me this woe, and I must bear its burthen. Mamma and papa will perhaps wonder at many things they may see; for they like Arthur, and I know they have let him feel that they care but little about his title and fortune. I must try to avoid questioning—that is all."

"Dear Phil, what is it you wish and hope?"

"I must think a minute, and look down to the bottom of my heart. Well, I think I should like him not to have the title and estates; and if it were so, I would ask papa to take care that I have only a little money; and then—well—then, perhaps, a light might dawn for us. And yet, perhaps, that might not be good for Arthur. He has pride too—

a pride of independence; a fitness for command; a right to give largely; and no habits that would sink easily into a trick of receiving pitifully. And so, Agnes, I have no especial wishes: my heart is a sort of Pandora's box—of my own filling, but without the one good gift at the bottom."

"Philippa, you make me wretched to hear you talk thus."

"I do! Well, that is one of the newborn sorrows. It is not on my conscience that I ever made you wretched before tonight."

"Darling! I repent of having said it."

"Yes, but that does not alter the fact;" and now the voice was tearful.

"Be bitter, if bitter words can help you," said Agnes, slipping on her knees, and twining her arms round Philippa's waist, so that their breaths mingled, and they felt what the moonlight scarcely revealed—that their eyes were drinking in mutual sympathy. "Be bitter, if you like; beat and bruise me with hard words, if it comfort you. *I*, at least, have a wish, a hope, at the bottom of my heart: it is that my best friend, my true sister, should use me.—Philippa!"

For answer there was not the spoken word, but a mute pressure, and a subdued weeping, that were very eloquent.

Philippa grew calmer after a while, and then she said,—

"Do you think I am out of my mind?"

"No, no, not that!"

"What then?" returned Philippa. "Tell me just what you think."

"I will. I am thinking of some words I heard spoken a few months ago, which, at the time, I only half understood, but wholly disbelieved. Now they come back to me like a proverb one has learned, without comprehending, till some real circumstance illustrates its meaning. One of mamma's acquaintances was talking to her about two or three marriages that had lately taken place—marriages that were thought by the world in general to be strange, incongruous unions. One was of a middle-aged widower to a girl of nineteen; another, of an excellent young man of two-and-twenty to a beauty of twenty-eight—the flirt of many seasons. I remember the lady said such marriages were the most natural things in the world."

"Natural!"

"Yes; and then she went on to declare, that quite half the heart-disappointments which occur, arise because two thoroughly ingenuous, sensitive, and every way suitable young people, do not know how to make known their love. A sensitive imagination induces each to exaggerate some little obstacle that a breath might have blown down, until some sort of blundering converts the molehill to a mountain. 'If both parties are humble, distrustful, and timid,' she asked, 'how are they to read any tokens aright?' And I remember she said the highest natures were just the ones that, if shackled by worldly teaching, or too rigid habits of conventionalism, were nearly sure, in a crisis of life, to make mistakes and confusion; whereas, when one of the two has had experience of the heart, the channels of sympathy can be kept open, and never choked by the rubbish of misunderstandings. I thought her a shocking person for talking in such a way; but, at least, I know now what she meant."

"Seeing such defects in society," said Philippa, in a tone of sarcasm, "did not this wise lady suggest some remedy—some help for poor young people?"

"Oh, no! she said people must get their experience the best way they could, though she thought they often bought it dearer than they need. And then she talked about her views with regard to her own daughters, when they should be grown up, very much as if she intended to settle their marriages for them, as our great-great-grand-parents used to do for their children, and as French mothers do in the present day."

"How horrible!" exclaimed Philippa.

"Horrible indeed!" echoed Agnes; and, of course, every English girl is ready to swell the chorus.

Dear English girls! You that for the most part are as good as you are fair, boast not too gaily of your freedom; for the noblest among you too often weave terrible invisible shackles for yourselves. Free to be chosen! and free, —a little free, perhaps—to choose! Ah, herein is your birthright; but, oh, how often is it squandered or frittered away before you learn its worth, or understand your own value!

> "A rosebud set with little wilful thorns,
> And sweet as English air can make her."

How often do the "wilful thorns" pierce the

hand that seeks only to carry its rose to the shelter of a true heart—while, because it is so ignorant, the rose succumbs to a mailed hand that is made but to crush, though it can assume a gesture of tenderness!

"Horrible—most horrible!" repeated Philippa, again shuddering at the idea of "French marriages," "better to suffer and be free—better be free to suffer, than to love to order—or to be bartered like a chattel without any love at all. Yes," she continued, throwing back her hair from her face as she spoke, "yes, I feel and understand that my pride or my temper—call it which you like—fretting on one idea has made a great tangle in my life—but don't believe, Agnes, that I would wish to be without the thoughts, without the memories, without the knowledge that make up what I suppose is called experience. I would not be the child I was six months ago—with life's great page white and unwritten; for it might have been blurred a thousand times more darkly;—experience might have been bought far more dearly. At least he is worthy of my love."

"For that reason," said Agnes, "it seems to me that a word of explanation—"

"Not now—not now—he would only still further misunderstand and despise me. After all, perhaps, his love is curable; and if so—well, then, I shall hope for myself."

"And if not curable?"

"Then—then—God is so good, that though I starve and freeze, I shall know that summer will some day come. Agnes, I am better now, but very selfish in keeping you up half the night."

"Let me help you to bed before I go;" and as she spoke, Agnes began plaiting up Philippa's long hair.

"Best darling!" said Philippa, accepting the sisterly service.

"Now, is that the right height for the pillow?"

"Just right—kiss me again before you go. And, Agnes, if I should have a headache in the morning, I shall breakfast in my room—but you will manage to be cheerful down stairs, won't you?"

"I will try—if you will try to sleep, that is."

"You should not make bargains with me."

"Why don't you call me a brute? I deserve it."

"Dear brute."

"I shall stay in the room for a little while in case you should want me."

"Stay near me."

"Yes—yes."

And Agnes knelt long and silently by Philippa's bed. I think we are nowhere told that prayers are accepted because of their loud utterance. When at last she rose, she knew by the measured breathing, for which she listened, that Philippa slept. And Agnes vaguely comprehended the grief of that heavy settled kind which wears the body like corporeal fatigue, and therefore does not quite forbid slumber. Perhaps Agnes felt doubly bound to struggle for cheerfulness at the breakfast table, which now in a few hours would be spread.

It was at that repast—at which Philippa was not present—that Arthur Rivingstone made apologies for shortening his visit at Sutton Court, and proposals for leaving without further delay. It is true that he had received another letter from his grandfather.

CHAPTER V.

FOLLOWING THE SWALLOWS.

"When thou haply seest
Some rare note-worthy object in thy travel—
Wish me partaker in thy happiness,
When thou dost meet good help."

TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA.

"HE should have known that I despised riches, and was jealous and suspicious of being valued for them!" The words came back from time to time on the "mind's *ear*" of Agnes Bendoran, and ever as it seemed with a fuller and clearer meaning. They explained little riddles of the past—such as petulances not otherwise to be accounted for; caprices scarcely marked enough to deserve the name; and a certain hesitation sometimes to be detected in what was, nevertheless, a positive

indulgence to Philippa Sutton—namely, the exercise of generosity and munificence.

Was it true, asked Agnes of herself—was it true that Philippa, so blessed in all the outward circumstances of her life—so absolutely and transparently truthful in word and deed—could nevertheless have swept and garnered one dark corner in her heart, to be occupied by such evil guests as envy, jealousy, and suspicion? The envying, the coveting—being a desire for the unattainable and a germ of rebellion against the position "in which it had pleased God to place her." That it was so, Agnes was constrained to admit.

And did Agnes, having hitherto believed her friend nearly perfection, now that she perceived her faults, love her the less? No—no—a hundred noes could not express the necessary negative.—Dearer beyond expression was the Philippa of to-day, than the Philippa of yesterday. There are faults confessed and struggled against, which, tendril-wise, may serve to bind one noble nature to another—but then they must be human frailties—not devilish attributes;—and they are unworthy to take a degree as students of human nature, who believe there can be

strong characters weighted with nobilities, where the balance is never tilted by extremes of feeling.

The old grandfather had spoken truly when he said pride was the parent of sin, and that to somebody's sin every sort of sorrow might be traced; and Philippa, in excusing her pride, had replied truly when she declared herself proud of him. Notwithstanding her exaggerated respect for what is called "high birth," never did she wish the true origin of her family to be ignored. Granted, that her views were warped—that her imagination was morbid on the subject—perhaps even for that very reason did her love of truth make her reject everything like a borrowed dignity. She was too clear-seeing to be ashamed of her ancestry—she involuntarily "took pride" in the mental and moral attributes of the men who seemed destined to prove founders of a family; but, young as she was, she had seen something of that ignoble pride, the pride of purse; and desiring with all the ardour of her young soul to steer her way clear of that Scylla, she skirted the eddies of an opposite Charybdis. Without some appreciation of the heights and depths of

Philippa Sutton's character, and without, at least, a suspicion of the almost womanish tenderness and purity which tempered the right manly nature of Arthur Rivingstone, it would be impossible to comprehend the misinterpretation which had arisen between them. Yet who does not know that the outer destinies of a life, and the inward satisfaction of a heart have often hinged on the right reading of a look, and the true understanding of a tone!

"Tell me," said Philippa Sutton to her friend a day or two after the midnight scene which has been described, "tell me, Agnes, as precisely as you can all that passed the morning Mr. Rivingstone left; and then—and then I think it will be best to consider that subject a prohibited one."

"There is very little, my dear Phil, to relate. Mr. Rivingstone looked pale and ill—what people call haggard—but I could see that he made an effort to sustain conversation just as usual, and I doubt very much if anyone but myself noticed his appearance—or, if Mrs. Sutton did observe it, she evidently thought it arose from some remaining indecision of mind about entering the army."

"He was not undecided," said Philippa, "his grandfather is aware of his compliance before now."

"And are you sorry?"

"No; because to my mind he is clearly fulfilling a duty. If I ever disliked the idea, it was because the life of a carpet soldier, in these peaceful days, seemed to present no field for the exercise of Mr. Rivingstone's abilities. But, lately, many circumstances have made me think differently. Under great excitement of mind, one often feels conscious of a strong destiny that has to be fulfilled. I feel it is his destiny to be a soldier, and that he will be none the less efficient because he loves learning, and has been a student. Perhaps, had I been all-yielding gentleness the other day—had I not been stung by his deprecation of papa's wealth—as if he supposed I were thinking of riches and poverty, when his love seemed rising like a day-dawn to my life—had I, in short, encouraged him to propose to me to be his wife—why, perhaps, this project of the army would have been abandoned. I cannot reason about it, Agnes—but I know that what has happened has happened for the best for him. And in this consciousness I am

more than consoled. I am—that is, I am going to be—quite happy. Only, dear, I am a little unreasonable sometimes; and, after to-day, it will be best not to talk about him. You think, Agnes, he was disappointed that I remained in my room all the morning?"

"I can only say that on one pretence or another, he delayed starting so long that your papa grew a little vexed, and, after the departure, said the horses must be over-driven for him to catch the train."

"Poor papa! why do people marry to be troubled by their children!"

"Phil!"

"You think I am bitter! Only sometimes."

"Dearest Phil, are you still quite—quite sure," said Agnes gently, and after a slight pause, "that nothing can be said or done to undo the mischief?"

"Quite sure!" returned Philippa, with emphasis. "Quite sure, according to my own sincere convictions; for there are some rights that we receive straight from God, and I feel distinctly that it is my right not to be interfered with in this crisis. If I err, be sure I shall suffer for my error bitterly. Remember, dear Agnes—for this makes all the difference

—that my parents have given me more than one token that they did not disapprove of the intimacy that was growing up between Arthur and me. I feel that I have loved him with their consent; and, since my own proud temper has marred the accomplishment of their wishes, I will at least spare them the trouble of knowing that I suffer. Besides, what is there to tell? You have seen, known, understood—rather than been told anything. Believe me, the crisis is not one for human interference. The knot is too intricate to be untwisted by speech. The future must be left to a Higher Power than man's, Agnes. Do you perceive what I so acutely feel?"

"I think I do; a touch of the tenderest finger, instead of disentangling the knot, might make it tighter! But, Phil, when I am far away, will you not write to me of that which so much occupies your heart?"

"Not unless I have something of importance concerning it to communicate—which is little likely. Yet do not fancy I am going to sink into indolence and apathy—I mean to busy myself with mamma's schools, and to interest myself in papa's politics and Edgar's studies, and to take up, so far as I

am able, the duties that lie before me. Oh, I shall have plenty to write about, never fear."

"I do not fear for the interest of your letters," said Agnes with a smile.

"And to think that you will be gone in a fortnight! You know, do you not, that mamma has quite settled that she and I are to take you as far as Paris?"

"It is indeed a delightful arrangement. I shall feel myself an experienced traveller by the time I reach the French capital, and not fear the rest of the journey."

A bright and breezy October morning; and in Paris, at the terminus of the Lyons Railway, there was a lingering, yet at the last a hurried parting. Then the rapid banging of doors, the snort of the struggling engine, the signal whistle, and the train, like an enchanted monster, began to stir. Soon it moves swiftly, as the darting landscape shows, and Agnes Bendoran, leaning back in the comfortable corner that has been secured for her, feels that the wrench is over, and a rubicon of her life already past. She is not in the mood to appreciate soft cushions and shaded windows, though she perceives every-

thing about her with a sort of preternatural vividness. Not for the first half-hour did she quite realise how the moments were lengthening the miles behind her; then a keen sense of loneliness gathered and coiled around her, and would not be lifted away till it had chilled and stung her. But Agnes was firm of heart and brave of will, and she fought against a weakness of which she tried to be ashamed; and fighting a good fight conquered her depression.

No need to repeat ordinary incidents of travel, or to photograph the characteristics of travelling companions, who will not appear again in this history. Agnes suffered herself to be amused and interested with much that was strange to her; and when, in a few hours, they entered on that lovely region, the valley of the Saône, she felt her heart already open to the sweet influences of the south. Even in the October sunshine, the haymakers were busy lading the air with our June perfume; while the vineyards, stretching far and wide their low trained wealth, seemed almost sentient of the lights and shadows that played upon their slopes. Sunburned children and dark-haired women coiffed with bright ker-

chiefs gave life to many a picture; and when quaint old Dijon had been reached and passed, and evening drew on, Agnes felt as if she had lived more than a day since morning.

At Lyons, picturesque, historic Lyons, she was met by a friend of Mr. Sutton's, and hospitably received by his family; speeded next day on her journey with true kindliness; and again there was a similar reception at bright, busy Marseilles. And here the melted sapphire of the Mediterranean dazzles her eye, and captivates her fancy. Can it be true, she asks herself, as she gazes from the deck of the steamer that is careering swiftly to Leghorn—can it be true that she, Agnes Bendoran, is really alone on these blue waters that wash the shore so dear to poets' hearts, and seem to hold a dumb mystery in their undulating waves? Is she really speeding to Italy, the nursing mother of the arts; and is it a destiny that she, small and feeble creature that she is, shall be nourished like the great of old?

But night brings out the old familiar stars, and she cannot but see that Arcturus droops like a star on a banner that is struck; and the Bear crawls nearer to the horizon, and she

feels that she is indeed leaving the north far away. Old ties and new hopes, how they tear at the heart, when the heart is large, generous, and imaginative! For such, a heart is the only instrument known on earth that has infinite octaves for vibration.

CHAPTER VI.

MONTGOMERY ROW.

"'Twas sad enough
To learn my future portion and submit;
And then the wear and worry, blame on blame."
ROBERT BROWNING.

RELYING on the capacity of the reader's imagination to travel from place to place swiftly as an electric telegram, it is necessary to look in for awhile on that home which, regarded prospectively, Mrs. Blake had designated "sixpenny lodgings."

The lodgings consisted in reality of a small house in one of the south-eastern suburbs. Medical authorities had praised the spot for its salubrity, and had almost insisted on it as a residence for Mr. Blake, who demurred for a time—on considerations of ways and means.

But just at the juncture of indecision, Millie Farrell surprised her relatives by a proposal that she should make one of their family, and pay eighty pounds a year for her board and lodging. It appeared that she had come to an open rupture with her brother, and had refused to dwell any longer under the same roof with him. The weak mother, desiring to take no part in the disputes between her children, nevertheless permitted her sympathies to lean towards her darling Charley, and hence Millie's determination to seek a separate home. Mrs. Blake had caught eagerly at the proposal —for it seemed to her the pleasantest thing that had happened since the dark troubles set in. Millie's eighty pounds, she argued to herself, would pay rent, taxes, and a host of tradesmen's bills, on the reduced scale of expenditure which was now to be attempted; while, of course, in a family that must number five or six, Millie's living would scarcely be felt.

Montgomery Row was a bald-looking line of brick houses, the tenants of which had hitherto appeared bound by a vow not to attempt any outward variety of adornment to their dwellings. True, the houses all belonged

to one landlord, and he found it expedient to "do" the painting and other furbishing by contract. Thus the iron-railings were all freshly green, and the house-doors all sticky with varnish, at the same period, and other similar matters were so arranged that the entire row wore shabby and rusty together. Then the aspect was a northern one—and right little can be done with a morsel of front-garden so situated; yet Mrs. Blake made up her mind that when summer came round she would fill the window-sills with hydrangeas and other plants that loved the shade—then, perhaps, No. 7 would not so often be mistaken for its fellows by stupid people who "beg pardon," but dirty the door-steps.

Meanwhile, she tried her best to make the interior of the new home look distinguished. But, alas! that best did not seem, to her really refined taste, to achieve much. What *can* be done with those low-roomed, square-built houses, which present no idea of form to the mind but that produced by a succession of right-angles! Then the furniture was in reality too handsome, too massive for the house. The large carved mahogany side-board, which had barely fitted the recess of a Bel-

gravian dining-room, filled up the little back parlour in a most uncomfortable manner. People knocked their shins and their elbows against it going in and out of the room, and I believe it would have been changed away, but for the mysterious charm of its old associations, and—the admirable locks of its cupboard conveniences.

There was not a mantel-piece broad enough to hold the French clocks—but this inconvenience Mrs. Blake overruled by dint of adopting the foreign fashion of a deal-board and red velvet. It seemed cruel work to cut curtains of good damask and fine muslin, because, after the amplest sweep, they trailed on the floor and caught the feet of passers by; but she did it, nevertheless, and was rewarded by finding some unexpected household use for the discarded fragments. Abundance of looking-glass certainly made the rooms look larger than they were, but no one was more sensible than Mrs. Blake that there was an incongruity in the whole *menage*. She often felt that the appliance of things too good for their purposes constitutes the most offensive sort of makeshift. Even exquisite china and graceful statuettes lost some

of their attractions when having for background a flaunty, ill-designed paper. Things, as well as people, are generally hurt by bad company, and it is a weak, tottering sort of beauty that wants a foil to lean upon.

It was December, and the month was conducting itself in a most December-like manner. A drizzling sleet was falling heavily, and suggesting to the fancy that a contest for the mastery between rain and snow was hardly yet decided. A laburnum tree, whose shade would doubtless be pleasant on summer days, flapped its leafless branches against the back parlour-window, while the same gusts of wind that rocked the tree and woke a weird sort of music drove the smoke in sudden blasts down the front chimney, greatly to the discomfort of the ladies who sat at the fire-side, and who, for the sake of increased light for their needlework, had opened the folding-doors that separated the wee dining-room from the so-called little drawing-room.

But trying as such weather was for an invalid, Mr. Blake, accompanied by the faithful Jackson, had gone to town on urgent business; and, disagreeable as such a day was for a country excursion, Elizabeth Hardy had fulfilled

a promise by coming to pass a few hours with her cousin. Thick shawl and dark bonnet being put on one side, Miss Hardy drew her thimble from her pocket, and promptly offered her sempstress services, perceiving, by a glance at the strewn table; how useful her help might be.

Now be it remarked, that, with all her faults, Mrs. Blake had never been an idle woman. Self-indulgent she was, and by nature an enjoyer of luxury; but self-enjoyment with her was by no means inaction, and in her luxuries she blindly sought for keen enjoyment, rather than passive reception of pleasure. In the days when milliners and upholsterers listened to her commandings, I believe there was as much wear and tear going on in the brain of the directress as in the brains of the employed; and she was aware of her own advantage in knowing that at a pinch she could herself do the thing she desired done; and because she never ordered the impossible, she won from many about her a willing obedience and respect. In her young widowhood, in the days of her early struggles, poverty had never depressed her to the torpor of don't-care-sluggishness. Whatever her own

well-trained fingers could do towards furthering her comfort, or the bettering of appearances, they did by a sort of instinct; and many a morning had she risen by daylight to retrim her one bonnet, and many a midnight in those by-gone years had found her swiftly plying her needle. Thus it fell out happily, and as a consequence of her character, that as soon as she rallied from the first stunning shock of her new troubles, she found, though half unconsciously, a solace in her very efforts to make the best of things. Full of plans and projects, her mind was almost restlessly active; and to-day, so pleased was she with the results of her individual handiwork, that she appeared almost in good spirits.

"Tell me, Clara," said Miss Hardy, settling herself comfortably near the fire, and putting her thimble on her finger; "tell me what I shall do to help you?"

"It is really too bad of me to set you to work directly you come into the house," replied Mrs. Blake; "but, Beta, you always were a good creature, and I can give you a simple task. That is a large table-cloth you see on my basket—of no earthly use to us

now as it is, and it is a little too much worn to be saleable. Will you cut it in half, and hem the edges for me? That will be better than buying small cheap ones, for I do hate coarse table-linen—don't you?"

"Certainly fine damask is an exquisite fabric, and this is really lovely," said Miss Hardy, applying herself to her task.

"Yes, and I like, when it is possible, for Compton to have about him the comforts to which he has been used all his life. I remember his saying one day, soon after we were married, that coarse linen made the finest dinner in the world look as if it were served in the kitchen. I have never forgotten the remark."

Beta sighed—a very gentle, inaudible sigh. She was wondering if the memory of her cousin Clara held with equal tenacity the many greater truths and wiser sayings that had fallen from her husband's lips; and perhaps she speculated a little as to the boundary line, where a fine taste passes from being a good gift to an insidious temptation. When Miss Hardy next spoke, she changed the current of conversation, by enquiring after Millie Farrell.

"I have scarcely seen her to-day," replied Mrs. Blake; "she is shut up in her room as usual, writing, I suppose."

"Really she must have shown a great deal of energy and perseverance, as well as talent," returned Miss Hardy, "to have made for herself her present independent position."

"Indeed yes," said Mrs. Blake; "for until Millie came to live with us, I had no idea that the life of an author could be so laborious as hers really is. I thought people gifted with her sort of abilities had only to sit down and scribble off their ideas as fast as the pen could gallop; but several days when I have said, 'Well, Millie, have you been writing a story this morning?' or, 'Have you been reviewing some books?' she has answered, 'I had proofs to correct, and have only written a very few pages;' or else, 'I have only been reading a book, for the purpose of forming an opinion of it.' And sometimes she has come down out of spirits, and out of sorts, declaring she had no head for work—she always calls her writing 'work' now-a-days."

"Perhaps she has overtoiled," suggested Miss Hardy, "and requires rest and recreation."

"Millie herself declares not, but she admits that the disagreement with her brother, and the various scenes she has gone through, have distracted her mind, so that she finds writing a greater task than formerly. Poor girl, I expect our troubles also have weighed upon her: indeed it was her brother's treachery and ingratitude to his uncle that caused her to change her home."

"I hope she is not really getting out of health," resumed Miss Hardy.

"I am sure I hope not, though she is certainly paler and thinner than she used to be; but you know this place must be healthier than London, so that really she ought to be well. Oh dear, oh dear," continued Mrs. Blake, after a short silence that had been disturbed by the discord of which she complained—"oh dear, they are beginning their abominable playing next door, practising scales and music too difficult for the player, on an old cracked piano. There, now, is a crunch of false chords, that makes me feel as if I were bruised to my fingers' ends!"

"It certainly is very disagreeable," said Miss Hardy, "and most unfortunate that the walls are so thin; it must be a child learning, I should think."

"Oh, we have more than one tormentor, I assure you. The mother, who must have learnt music in the ark, pierces my ears with the Bird Waltz, and the Blue Bells of Scotland. This is the daughter, who, without the slightest comprehension of time or tune, is now thumping away; but who, as I hear from Julie, is being brought up for a governess, and, therefore, must profess to know everything."

"Poor half-educated governesses, how I do pity them!" exclaimed Miss Hardy.

"Well, so do I: but I wish this young girl would leave music alone. It is mere waste of time for her to attempt to play, though she may have talent enough for something else. I tried the other day what playing my own very best would do to put these people down, but they have no shame. Ten minutes after I had finished a sonata of Beethoven's, in a style that has often held a hundred people breathless, I heard the mother's old twitter. And then of an evening, when Compton is at home, and the house is quiet, they are at it again. I am sure it must irritate him more than he allows. I believe some time or other, I shall have to send in a message, to beg them to be still."

"That would be awkward, would it not, unless there were serious illness to plead?"

"Awkward or not, I know I shall have to do it. Oh, Beta, these are the little daily disagreeables that make a small house so vexatious."

"Let us hope, Clara, that better days will come again."

"I don't see the dawn of them yet; unless, indeed—well, what I find hard to bear is, that Compton has no ambition left to retrieve matters. I hear nothing from him but expressions of thankfulness that things are no worse."

"Surely, Clara, it is well for him to have that feeling."

"Of course, in one sense it is. But I don't like to see him so tame under humiliations; for instance, taking that allowance from Simmonds, without a murmur at a man he has raised from nothing, stepping into his shoes."

"But, my dear, what would you do without it?—from what I understood of the affair, it is an act of kindness and consideration on Mr. Simmonds' part to make such an arrangement. And you remember how he

stipulated that Mr. Moore should know nothing about it."

"Oh, yes—I know that—but still—why, after all, it don't amount to two hundred a year; and if Compton were not able to do a little business for himself, we could not live even here. The fact is, Beta, it has been on my mind for some weeks to talk to you about an idea I have of making some money. You have common sense, and would listen to reason, I know."

"Teaching music?" said Miss Hardy, speaking with the flash of her thought. "I dare say you could find plenty of pupils."

"Bah! I should not get money enough to pay for the shoes I should wear out, and for my draggled skirts. No, thank you, no more teaching. Now, Beta, don't let me take your breath away—what should you say to my going on the stage?"

"Being an actress!"

"Why not?—you know what a sensation I always made in the private theatricals, and everyone said I must have been born with histrionic talent. Surely you have no narrow prejudice against the stage?"

"I hope not. On the contrary, my ideal

of actors, and of their possible influence and true position, is a very high one. And we ought not to argue the question on a low basis. But I have always understood that even with the greatest amount of natural talent, the actor requires a long course of practice and training."

"I have had practice, and therefore some training; and besides, Beta, I am not old yet."

"Not old, absolutely; but one should be quite young, I think, to enter upon an arduous profession."

"You know I am on the summer side of forty yet, and I believe that when I am well and in really good spirits, I do not look my age:—I have always heard that Mrs. Siddons made no reputation till she was nearly thirty, and that her greatest triumphs were in quite middle life."

"And what does Mr. Blake think of your purpose?" asked Miss Hardy, who seemed half-stunned with surprise.

"He has not the slightest idea of it," returned the wife, "nor do I intend to give him a hint until my plans are a great deal more matured. I don't want to be thwarted at the

beginning; if opposition must come, I would rather it should be when it is too late for me to give in."

"But, Clara, are you doing right—ought you not to consult your husband before taking any steps in such an important affair?"

"Now, my dear Beta, pray do not preach about duty and obedience. You single women have such absurd ideas concerning married life:—all very well in theory, and plausible in books, but not practical in real life, I assure you. How can you know anything about the rights and wrongs of married people?"

What can a poor spinster do under such a rebuke—especially when it comes from a matron who has had two husbands? Only can she sit nearly silent, and remain quite unconvinced. Miss Hardy, however, did venture to remark, that "whatever was 'very well' in theory must be true, and that whatever was really true must be practical."

"That is what I call transcendental rubbish," returned Mrs. Blake, "forgive me for saying so—but you know I never soar with you into the regions of abstract thought—is that the phrase? I know I am of the earth—very earthy."

The cousin did not contradict.

"Beta," continued Mrs. Blake, "you will not tell Compton what I have been saying to you?"

"You hurt me, Clara, by the thought that I could be capable of making mischief between you. Only I lament that you have not full confidence in your husband's judgment and affection. Surely you would not carry out your plan in opposition to his known wishes?"

"I mean to make no pledges, but to be guided by circumstances. I beg your pardon, my dear Beta, for my momentary fear,"—and Mrs. Blake leaned forward to offer the woman's kiss of atonement,—"but you are so terribly good and correct in your notions, that sometimes I am not quite sure what you may fancy it right to do."

"Always be quite sure," returned Miss Hardy in a voice that was a little husky, "always be quite sure that I should think it a great sin to make mischief between those whom God hath joined. Clara," she added, trying to force a smile, "believe me you will find it through life much safer to trust people who follow out abstract ideas—only another

term for principles—than those who profess to be guided by circumstances."

"Well, well—I know how good you are—and it is always a comfort to me to talk to you. If I have your approval in anything I do, I always feel the stronger for it; and you are not like some touchy people I know, offended when I do not take your advice. Very often, when I most differ from you, I feel that you are better than I."

"I am older, and my life has passed more in the shade than yours. I have been rather a looker-on, than a marcher in the dusty high road of temptations."

"Well, however that may be, I want to tell you how I came to think of turning my theatrical talents to profitable account. You remember that dreadful night of the ball and concert, and the rude way in which Madame B—— resented some slight, real or fancied, that she had received. Not that I was in a state of mind to notice her, but other people did; and a few weeks afterwards, she wrote me one of the prettiest notes of apology you ever saw. Then she has sent us presents of fruit and game more than I can remember; and one day, just as we were leaving London, she

called on me, and the result has been that we have become quite friendly and confidential. She told me how her heart had ached on hearing of our troubles, to think that she, by her temper that terrible night, might have given me one additional pang. I am sure it is her warm, impulsive nature that makes her such an *artiste;* and somehow in conversation mention was made of my having acted in charades and private theatricals, and this led up to the idea of my making the stage a profession."

"Did she advise you to the step?"

"Yes, strongly. As she frankly said, we never should be rivals; for, though an Englishwoman, she acts chiefly in Italian opera, or, if she appears on the English stage, it is still in opera. Now I don't sing; my line would be simply genteel comedy, for which she says there is such an opening. And she has promised to give me the necessary introductions to managers, and, in short, to stand my friend in every possible way. Then, you see," continued Mrs. Blake, after a momentary pause, "you see Millie Farrell knows heaps of people connected with the press, so I really think I stand a good chance of having my abilities,

such as they are, fairly recognised. To tell you the truth, Beta, my idea is not to say a word to Compton on the subject till my plans are thoroughly matured. Then he will be more likely to see the affair in a favourable light than I can expect him to do at present, when there are so many hills of difficulty, apparently in the way."

"But I should think," said Miss Hardy, "I should think, my dear Clara, that you must know pretty accurately what your husband's feelings on this momentous question are likely to be. I say feelings, because it seems to me that it is just one of those occasions on which individual personal feeling might overbalance abstract general opinion."

"He is so odd, that really now-a-days I don't feel sure what he will say, or what he will think about anything."

And, as the wife thus spoke, she so wilfully blinded her judgment, that perhaps she believed she was speaking the literal and exact truth to within half a degree. But, clever as we all are at self-deception, and dexterous at shutting out from our minds unwelcome truths, these have such a penetrative quality that they will creep in at cracks and

crannies, very much as the sunlight insists on declaring itself, and flickering in fine lines on the floor and ceiling of a closed room, notwithstanding the iron-barred shutters.

"If, after all, Mr. Blake should disapprove," pursued the cousin, "think how much time and energy you will have wasted—not of your own only, but, it seems to me, of other persons."

"All which circumstances will give weight to my arguments, if, unfortunately, I should have to contend with him on the subject."

"But, Clara, would you really contend? Do you think any earthly gratification is worth the price of contention with your husband?"

"I don't know. I must acknowledge that in the time of prosperity I rarely had to contend. Compton seldom refused me what I wished; never anything on which I had quite set my heart. But, as I said before, latterly he has been so odd; and, since apparently he has lost ambition, perhaps it has become my duty to rouse myself, and, even for the sake of our children, to see what can be done towards keeping our heads above water."

"I would not dissuade you from your at-

tempt," returned Miss Hardy; "but I do wish that it could be made with your husband's perfect sanction and concurrence."

"It is impossible," exclaimed the other, with an emphatic shake of the head. "I will tell you what it is. This is just a case in which a triumph will make everything right.

'Success is virtue, and misfortune blame.'

I remember that line in an old school-book—don't you?—though I have never stumbled on it anywhere else. I daresay Compton would not like me to be a third-rate actress; but a *prima donna*, that is another thing. He never objected to my appearing in tableaux, or in theatrical performances before two or three hundred acquaintances; and what can it signify whether one acts to hundreds or thousands? For my part, I think the public a most good-natured animal, never spiteful, and not half so critical as a clique of one's friends. Then I do know positively that my husband does not disapprove of women distinguishing themselves in other professions—see how proud he is of his niece, and I am sure he takes the greatest possible interest in every bit of news concerning Agnes, and

seems to have the greatest faith in her talents. By-the-bye, you had another letter from her last week, had you not?"

"Yes, but I have not got it with me."

"I suppose it is full of praises of her new friend. But, my dear Beta, you need not fear talking of Lady Isabella Clinton. I can assure you I am no longer thin-skinned on that subject. When Mrs. Sutton wrote to me about her proposal concerning Agnes, I told Compton the whole story. There was no fault of mine, and that he sees. How could I help Captain Bendoran falling in love with me, and declining to marry her? And you know we were both so young!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE EVENING POST.

"What letter is this same? What's here?
* * * *
But fly I hence, I fly away from life."
TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA.

THE early December evening drew on apace, and a few stars that glimmered in the sky, though as if still struggling with cloud and mist, shone out long before Mr. Blake returned from the city, and long before the family dinner-hour.

In other days the pre-prandial hour or two of winter darkness had been got through satisfactorily enough by Mrs. Blake. What with the refreshing "ladies' cup of tea," a somewhat elaborate toilette, and the last new novel, that odd fragment of time had seemed

to have its appointed use. Indeed, the fashionable lady had been heard to say, that her only time for reading was while Julie dressed her hair, and in winter-time, just before dinner. Now, however, things were changed: though Mrs. Blake still "dressed for dinner," her toilette was not elaborate, and the hour itself being altered — for divers reasons— from half-past seven to six o'clock, the interval seemed one of those shreds of eternity which, while hesitating how to employ, we often suffer to entangle us in the quickly-woven meshes of reverie.

Now, reverie is good, exceedingly good, for the God-guided, aspiring soul: for such the twilight musing is but a listening to what the angels are telling: the rustle of their passage up and down the dream-ladder is now half audible, and the throb of the stars as they dart to their thrones, finds in the human heart an answering throb, which proclaims the kinship of All the Created. Even in a dull, dark room, reverie may be bright and beautiful; and the minutes that seem wasted, may, after all, be richly dowered, and leave behind the rarest gifts. But with thoroughly worldly people inured to their world-

liness, and quite satisfied with themselves, the case is often very different; and their meditations may be on their own merits, and on schemes of which their own outward worldly interests form the sole pivot. Alas! it had been so lately with Clara Blake. In the twilight, firelight time, she had ruminated to herself so successfully, that she had drugged her conscience with regard to deceiving her husband, and fed up her vanity by self-flattery, until she entertained quite an absurd estimate of her talents, accomplishments, and personal attractions. Then dexterously she had brought forward one duty—her duty to advance the worldly prosperity of her children—and this duty she had as it were held so close to her eyes, that it eclipsed all others, and totally obscured to her mental vision the motives that were really swaying her.

To-day, however, she had no time for rumination, no time to gather back and strengthen the forces of evil determination, which had been disturbed by her cousin Beta's quiet words; disturbed more, perhaps, than Clara was willing to acknowledge, even to herself. For she did value Miss Hardy's approval of her various doings more even than

she had confessed; and if only Beta had "entered into her feelings," and applauded her purpose, she would have felt herself three times more resolute and determined. Not that she wavered, but she was just sufficiently unhinged for her temper to be frayed; and, consequently, she showed an irritability and vexation at trifles, that seemed to have the power of recalling to the minds of others more vividly than need be, the recent troubles.

Yet the looker-on might have dreamed that the modest home might still be a cheerful and happy one. With a blazing fire, and the curtains drawn, the little parlour looked very cosey; and by gas-light—for the subtle city illuminator had trailed its course even to Montgomery Row—by gas-light the glaring paper seemed subdued, and its colours were more harmonious. Books, and music, and woman's needlework were in sight, to give the place a home aspect; and as the little family group gathered round the fire, while Jackson noiselessly and efficiently laid the cloth, Elizabeth Hardy could not but remember that there had been a time in her cousin's career, when, to be mistress of such a dwelling as this, would have been a rise in

life for her—a something for which to be thankful and grateful. Yet now she only complained.

Mr. Blake seemed none the worse for his fatiguing day in town. He still carried his arm in a sling, and walked with a stick; but on the whole he looked better than he had done since his illness. Perhaps a ray of hope that was glimmering for him in connection with business affairs, lighted up his countenance, and made the difference.

When Millie Farrell came down stairs, Miss Hardy thought her looking decidedly ill, and indeed she complained of a headache, but thought "it would pass off after dinner."

"If this stifling little room does not make it worse," observed Mrs. Blake.

"I assure you, dear aunt," replied Millie, "I feel it quite fresh, and a pleasant change after sitting in my own room all the morning."

"Ah, true," sighed Mrs. Blake; "it is quite a shame, my dear, that we have not another sitting-room for you to write in."

"Oh, not at all. I manage very nicely; and you know I stipulated to be at the top of the house, out of everybody's way."

"Except mine," said the little Clarissa—a

shrewd, hopeful-spirited child of eight years old, who was still too young to have felt the late troubles, save in the shadows that fell upon her from the graver and sadder faces by which she was surrounded—"you don't mind me coming into your room whenever I like, do you?" and the little girl settled her doll's frock with a sort of self-satisfied air. "You don't mind it, Millie, do you?"

"Not much;" and Millie smiled as she spoke, for she penetrated the incipient vanity which made the little Clarry proud of doing that from which others refrained, and felt indulgently towards the companionless child.

"There is a nice closet in the room, where I play at shutting up dolly when she's naughty; that's why I go in so often—Millie lets me," continued the little girl, as if she had a vague consciousness that some further explanation had been necessary.

"I think Millie spoils you," said Mr. Blake, raising the little chatterer to his knee, as if not disinclined to continue the process, in his own fatherly fashion. But in a few minutes dinner was served; not, however, till Miss Hardy had had time to reflect that —taking into account the musically inclined

neighbours, the play predilections of the little Clarissa, the fretful repinings of Mrs. Blake, not to mention graver troubles in which Millie's kind heart could not fail to participate—the domestic surroundings of the authoress could hardly be favourable to her literary avocations.

Montgomery Row was of course favoured or plagued with its five or six posts a-day; and hardly was dinner ended when the evening "tap-tap" was heard in the Row, and in due time it sounded at number seven. The next minute Jackson handed two missives addressed to Miss Farrell. The first was a blue stamped packet, evidently containing MSS.; the second was a letter from some strange correspondent, directed in a feminine scratchy handwriting that looked as if it had been made tremulous by hurry or agitation. The note paper and envelope corresponded, were thin and tinted, and smelt strongly of *patchouli*.

Millie broke first the seals of the heavy packet, to find her quick fears confirmed. The last article she had sent to a certain editor was here regretfully, politely, but quite definitively returned as unsuitable to his pages.

Millie was little accustomed to have her articles rejected. Scarcely had such a thing occurred since the early days of her literary career, and she felt none the less depressed by the circumstance of this one coming back because she had had her fears about it. She had had a glimmer that the thing was more vague, more loosely constructed than the generality of her writings, and yet she had been incompetent to make it better. Not feeling ambitious to own the parentage, she had sent it with instructions that her usual signature might be omitted—a very foolish proceeding, if money, not fame, were her object—for the editor would have inserted a weaker contribution, decorated by the badge of its authorship.

But, though Millie Farrell was a little humiliated by the editorial rejection, certainly the second strange and mysterious epistle, that in the scratchy handwriting, had something about it calculated to restore her self-esteem. Probably in this scribbling age, when such multitudes of people of all classes and conditions seem impelled as if by an irresistible law to precipitate their thoughts and opinions on paper, the letters from un-

known correspondents, which successful authors receive, may not be among the least interesting of our modern curiosities of literature. At any rate, they are pretty safe thermal and barometric tests of the receiver's true weight and standing with that unknown band of sympathisers who make his public; and to whom—strange paradox!—he has spoken out his shyest fancies and most deep-rooted convictions more fondly and freely than ever he may have uttered them to his nearest heart-friend. If it be safe to judge a person by the character of his associates, it is a doubly sure test to judge of him by the books he loves. In the one case there may be disturbing forces at work—family ties, old habits, and the thousand fetters of circumstance that impede the aspiring soul ere it finds fellowship with its kind; but, with regard to the loved and chosen books, the selection is comparatively free.

During her literary career, Millie Farrell had received many letters from strangers; and I confess, if her little weakness must be owned, that there were still in existence some half-dozen of these epistles, tied up with faded ribbon, and put away in a private

drawer. Among them, by the way, was one not altogether complimentary—nay, it contained something very like an accusation that she was not a true and Christian steward of her talents. Yet, though she had burnt a score of flatteries, she had kept this letter, which flavoured by its bitter myrrh the honeyed packet with which it rested. The thoughts were so lucid, the composition was so brilliant, the scholarship so evident, the tenderness of the regrets so earnest and manly, that if but for a model of style it must be kept.

Commonly, however, the strangers' letters were of pure adulation; and Millie had long since discovered that a considerable portion of her admirers consisted of "ununderstood" young people, who fancied that in Millie's pages they found the clear expressions of their own feeble murmurings and complainings. These adoring correspondents, while eulogising Millie, often convicted themselves of egregious egotism, and unjustifiable discontent; and, certainly, the flattery of such praisers had not been enough to "turn her head!" Nevertheless, praise is sweet, a *soupçon* of flattery not always altogether nau-

seous, and some considerable amount of sympathy really necessary to the intellectual worker; and, on the whole, Millie was the better for knowing so much of the thoughts of that outside world, her readers.

The present epistle, however, differed very considerably in some particulars from any former communication. There was the usual amount of admiring homage, and yet not quite the usual evidence of earnest respect. The writer spoke of the "delight," "joy," "support," that Millie's writings had proved to her, but she expressed all this in the tone of a "sister spirit;" declared that at the present moment she was in a crisis of her life which resembled in a startling degree a phase in the career of one of Millie's imaginary heroines—that her story was "stranger than fiction"—and on the fourth side of her sheet she "ventured" to declare that she proposed calling on Miss Farrell to ask personally for her sympathy and advice. The letter, which was undated, bore the signature, "Barbara L. Neville," and Millie could not but feel that the name sank into her mind never to be forgotten. Though Millie, as we know, had had her own little

mystery once upon a time, she was by nature especially frank and unsecretive. On opening the packet she had freely remarked that it contained a rejected article; and, since she could not read the second communication without smiling, she passed it round the family circle in a semi-confidential manner, that her relatives might know the cause of her risibility, and know there was a visitor some day to be expected.

"What an idiot!" was Mrs. Blake's blunt commentary, but she added, "I am sure this Barbara Neville is very far from being the 'sister spirit' that she calls herself, for you never wrote such trash as this."

"Poor thing!" exclaimed the tender-hearted Elizabeth Hardy, "I should judge the writer of this letter was misguided, undisciplined, rather than foolish. Perhaps she has no true friend at hand, and is thus driven, as it were, to address a stranger."

"Take care, my dear, not to compromise yourself with people you know nothing about," said Mr. Blake, laying his hand affectionately on his niece's shoulder; but the next moment a more generous impulse than the first prompting of the man-of-the-world

spirit gained the mastery, and he added, "Not that I would have you repulse the young lady—it is likely enough that she may be in some trouble, and that good, sensible advice may be invaluable. And, Millie, my dear, I hope you feel thoroughly at home with us, and will always receive your friends and acquaintances as if the house were your own."

"Thank you—thank you, uncle—I am sure you know that I do feel quite at home, but I should be very sorry if my visitors discomposed my aunt."

"They never have discomposed me yet," returned Mrs. Blake. "Indeed, Millie, I think you have a charming set of friends. I only wish I had known some of them before. I had no idea literary people were so nice. Compton"—addressing her husband—"just fancy—while Mr. Jerrard was waiting a few minutes to see Millie the other day, he amused himself with whistling to the bullfinch, and the bird has had another note ever since. I don't believe I should have had courage to go into the room, if I had not through the folding doors heard what he was doing. Then there's Mrs. Mabel Howard, whose

poems I remember ever since I was a girl—she took Clarry on her knee when she called, and told the child a wonderful fairy tale from the Norse that has not yet been published, though I expect it will be as famous some day as 'The Pet Goat,' or 'The Hornet and the Bee.' Really, I could not fancy such a kind, motherly creature could be the famous authoress; and she told me all about the Quakers, though she left that sect long ago. I am glad she did, for her bright eyes would not have looked so well under a dingy poke bonnet, as they did with a pretty black velvet one, or her grey hair as softened as it seemed by pale pink ribbon bows."

Perhaps Mrs. Blake would have dilated still longer on the merits and common-sense qualities of Millie's literary friends, and would have drawn forth more approving rejoinders than as it happened her husband had time to utter; but at this juncture there was heard the sound of a vehicle drawing up before the house—then the creak of the gate—and the next minute a tremulous double knock at the street door.

"Who can it be?" exclaimed Mrs. Blake, "we so seldom have visitors in the evening."

But the wonderment was speedily solved by Jackson announcing that a young person of the name of Neville wanted to see Miss Farrell. Yes, notwithstanding the fluttering double knock, Jackson, who had not heard the sound of wheels, announced the unescorted evening visitor as a "person," not a lady; and while there was a slight scuffle to close the folding doors, and thus improvise a reception room, Millie glided into the passage, and advanced towards the veiled figure that still remained near the door mat.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE YOUNG PERSON.

"And was so pleasant, and so busy kind,
No traitor could have guessed his traitorous mind;—
Full deep in grain he dyed his pleading powers;—
Yea as the serpent hideth under flowers."

CHAUCER (MODERNISED).

MILLIE FARRELL held out her hand to the stranger, whom she welcomed in a tone of courtesy and encouragement. Her cordiality was responded to very gratefully, for the visitor seemed to have expended much more than a moiety of her courage in writing her request for an interview, and had very little left for the critical moment of self-introduction. Probably it was only when the knocker had sounded at her touch, that the young girl had really felt what a strange and im-

pertinent thing she was doing; and possibly if Millie had been haughty and cold in her greeting, instead of gracious and sympathetic, this human waif, drifted as it were to her feet by a stream of circumstances, would have been lifted away even now by some sudden wave of impulse, and carried for ever out of the reach of her personal influence.

"You are very kind," said the stranger as her hand fluttered out of Millie's grasp, and in a voice that showed by its thick tremble how fast the heart was beating, "it is so good of you not to be angry with me for calling, and at such an hour too. I know I ought to have waited till to-morrow—but I knew you would be just like your writings. No, not, please, there, where there are other people so near," she continued, seeing that Millie was moving towards the parlour—"let me see you alone—quite alone, oh, pray do."

"Then I believe I must take you into my bedroom," said Millie, lighting one of the chamber candles that stood upon a slab, and reflecting that certainly it would not have been quite right to invite confidence in a room separated from other people only by folding doors.

"Oh, anywhere—anywhere," returned the other, and Millie, holding the candle aloft, guided her visitor up the narrow stair-way.

Millie's chamber was, as has been said, "out of the way, at the top of the house;" but, nevertheless, it was a sufficiently commodious apartment, and she had but to stir up a somewhat neglected fire, to illuminate the room. A small undraped bed stood in one corner, but was by no means a conspicuous object. A writing table strewn with books and papers—though in a not disorderly manner—first struck the eye; while book-shelves, appeared to dispute for space with a wardrobe, as if they were intent on driving it out at the door; two or three comfortable-looking chairs, a foot-stool on the hearth rug, a shaded lamp ready to light, and letters and cards leaning about the mantel-piece, proclaimed at once the semi-sitting-room.

"Take off your bonnet and cloak, pray do," said Millie, "for I see you must have been in the rain—I felt your clothes were damp when I touched you just now."

"Ah, that was in the afternoon then, when I was wandering and waiting, for it does not rain now," replied the girl, looking at her

garments, and adding, while she threw off her bonnet as if glad to be relieved of its weight, "oh, my cloak will dry while I sit by your nice fire, without my taking it off."

But Millie would have her will, and unclasped the cloak with her own hands; then seeing that the visitor shrank and shivered as if with cold, Millie placed a warm shawl of her own over her shoulders. The girl drew it round her with a quick gesture of gratitude, and then looked up with the granite look of grief, not yet softened by the mist of tears. And yet the dark eyes were naturally very lustrous, and, probably, capable of the most varied expression. Indeed, as soon as the bonnet was removed, Millie perceived that her visitor was an exceedingly beautiful girl, apparently under twenty years of age. Above the common height, and of a finely developed figure, she had a well-shaped head, set on one of those rare columnar throats, whose every line is a line of beauty, and whose movements have an indescribable grace that is rarely traced to its source; hers also was a delicately curved cheek, and these two "unconsidered trifles" of beauty often go a great way towards making up the most fasci-

nating sort of loveliness, If nose and mouth were not quite Grecian, they were at least as near that ideal as one is likely to find in a long day's search; while a profusion of auburn hair, with the true fire tangle in its threads, fell in natural curls about her face, as if given for a veil.

"You are in trouble," said Millie, instinctively drawing her chair nearer, and taking the young girl's hand. Eight-and-twenty feels so maternally towards the teens!

"In trouble! yes, I suppose people call it trouble!" was the reply; but the stranger suffered her hand to remain in that of Millie, who saw that she must go on questioning.

"You said in your letter," she proceeded, "that you were in circumstances very like some I had depicted, and that I might be able to help you—tell me, what can I do?"

"Ah! my letter, so much has happened since I wrote it!—I was not so very miserable yesterday. I thought things would turn out just as you made them to do in your story of the Runaway Match—that is in the end, if not just at present."

"Runaway matches seldom turn out well," said Millie, "though I believe I made my

heroine happy at last;" and she added, "I hope you are not contemplating anything of the sort?"

"If people love one another, they ought to marry without anybody interfering, that is what I think; there ought not to be any occasion for running away. But don't be alarmed," she continued, after a moment's pause, "it is most likely I—shall—never—be married at all;" and as the young girl spoke, her voice grew hard, and her words came forth singly, striking the ear like pebbles as they fell.

"Yet I suspect you have a lover," said Millie; "and if your attachment is opposed, either by his family or your own, your position must be very distressing, and you need the wisest advice."

"That is why I come to you, because you are so clever—and because I feel that I could not tell anybody else in the world;" and Barbara lifted her handkerchief to her face, as if to hide its flush.

"Have you no mother?"

"My mother died two years ago; and papa is a poor Lieutenant in the Navy—always away—he is out on the China station now."

"That is very sad—have you no sister—no brother?"

"No near relation in the world except papa—he left me in a school the last time he was in England; but the school-mistress died, and there was nobody who had a right to control me, and so I became a governess."

"A governess!"

"Yes, a daily governess—I don't wonder you are surprised—but my mother was a Frenchwoman, so that I speak French just as well as she did; and people think so much of that accomplishment, that it makes them overlook a great many deficiencies."

"But you don't live alone, do you?" asked Millie.

"No, not quite. The German teacher and I club together, and we get on pretty well—but I couldn't tell her about—about it, oh, not for the world. She is such a stupid old thing, except over her Goethe and Fichte, and all the other headache-giving books."

"If you really are thus friendless," said Millie, "it would be cruel of me to refuse my advice in your difficulty, whatever that advice may be worth; but you must treat me as sick people do a physician, and tell me what you suffer."

"Yes, I will—it was for that I came—because you will sympathise with me—I know you will—and no one can advise me who don't feel for me. Cold-hearted people would be sure to tell me to do something I could not do."

"But are you prepared to take advice from one who *can* sympathise with you?" said Millie in a tone of extreme tenderness; for the youth, the beauty, the strange impulsive frankness of the girl had worked like a spell, and though she felt that probably it was a very faulty creature she saw before her, Millie could not help a profound pity springing up in her heart.

"I will not quite promise," said the other; and now her voice betrayed the power of Millie's tenderness, and there seemed a choking at the throat, which forced her to loosen her collar—"I will not quite promise—but I will—yes, I will do anything you tell me, if it is not just one thing."

"Tell me your trouble from the beginning," and Millie again pressed Barbara's—now ungloved—right hand; as she did so, she remarked the single ring it bore. It was a curious rather than a very valuable

trinket, though among a certain class of *cognoscenti* it would have been highly prized. The gem was a cut onyx, representing a hawk in its downward flight, and it was set in a golden hoop, plain as a wedding ring. The whole formed a man's ring, and consequently swung round loosely even on Barbara's second finger.

Now it so happened that among Millie's heterogeneous sorts of knowledge, was a more than tolerable acquaintance with cameos. Once, in reference to a memoir she was employed to write, she had had to "cram" for knowledge on the subject, and ever since had felt interested in it. Consequently the habit had grown upon her of observing everything of the sort that came in her way, and as she noticed Barbara's ring, she felt convinced that she had not only seen it—or its twin counterpart—before, but had handled and examined it, although the where and the when did not present themselves to her mind.

"Yes, I will tell you," proceeded Barbara, and by this time she had seated herself on the footstool, and was leaning her head on Millie's knee. "Yes, I will tell you the truth. I first saw *him* in the street, when I was coming

home from my teaching—but I would not speak to him, indeed I would not, and I was angry when he spoke to me. Then he wrote me a letter, oh, such a letter, asking me to forgive his rudeness, and to give him some little sign that I did so—and that he would never—never offend again—and—and—he never did speak in that light, rude way again. Oh! Miss Farrell, you believe in love—you must—you have said you do, and you have said that lovers should trust one another—and should they not?"

"True and honourable lovers—yes," said Millie, with deep emotion, for a very agonising feeling was creeping round her heart, and seizing it with a tighter grip than ever could have proceeded from the pangs of mere womanly sympathy. She suspected she had been a mis-teacher and a mis-leader to this poor young creature, and the remorse that comes before repentance was upon her.

"True and honourable!" exclaimed the young girl, repeating Millie's words, "how is one to know about true and honourable, except by one's own heart? I have been true—true—true—I have wished to be a queen, that I might prove how I loved him—to be

rich, that I might give him a fortune—or to be clever, like you, and do something he might be proud of; but I had no such ways of showing that I was true and honourable—and so—and so—"

"And so?—" murmured Millie in the low tone of questioning entreaty, and smoothing the bright hair, whose ends streamed over her lap.

"And so, when he maddened me by doubting my love, I could only prove it by meeting him and trusting him as he wished;" and as Barbara sobbed forth these words, there came to her relief the blessed rain of tears;—a rain that relaxed the rigid mask of her features, and washed away the stony glare from her eyes.

"Until to-day," continued the poor girl, when again she was able to speak—"until to-day I thought he was making arrangements for our marriage—and I was able to bear the reproaches—and the cruelty—and the being turned out of those proud people's house because somebody had seen or said something, I hardly know what. I could bear it all, though I wrote to you that I might know you, and ask you for help and advice. But now—

oh! if God would but kill me, and not leave me to do it myself."

"Hush! as you are a Christian, drive back such horrid thoughts."

"A Christian! I don't know that I am. My mother was a Papist once, and then she turned Puritanical, and used to say everything I thought pleasant was wicked. He says it is all nonsense about purgatory, and a still worse place, and you don't believe in such things, Miss Farrell—I know you don't?"

Surely if a sharp blade had pierced her flesh Millie's heart would not have quivered with such an agony as it did at these words. But she struggled, and successfully, for outward composure as she exclaimed, "What can I have written that you should think me an infidel?"

"Oh, nothing in which you say so exactly —only, as *he* has often told me, one can soon find out whether an author believes in such things or not; now, ever since I read that story of yours in which you portray the poet Lunally, pitying him so about his second wife, I have felt sure that you did not believe what they preach at church any more than he did."

Millie Farrell turned pale at these words, and felt as if her blood were chilling with the approach of some mighty wave of trouble. Right well she remembered that story-description of one whom in her early days she had venerated as a master-spirit; a story praised extravagantly by small critics of a certain ultra-set, but mourned over by a few of her personal friends, and ignored by the high class journals, whose conductors did not deem it of sufficient importance for the bull's eye of their beacon lights to be thrown upon it.

"Let me confess that I do not extenuate Lunally now as I did in my younger days," said Millie; "I have seen, and especially within the last few months, much more of life and of human afflictions than I had then, and I have keenly felt that revealed religion is the only support of the soul in its distress."

"Then, if you are religious," said Barbara, lifting her head from Millie's knee, and looking up with a stare of dull amazement—"if you are religious you must think my thoughts wicked—and perhaps I had better go."

"You must not go," cried Millie, grasping the girl's arm tightly, but tenderly, "you must not go till we know something more of each

other. I am afraid my powers of usefulness are very limited; but if it be true that my wretched writings have been poison to your mind, I owe to you that I seek an antidote with all the strength of my being. Bear with me a moment, for you have shocked me greatly."

Millie tried hard to keep back the tears that would not be restrained, and as she did so she felt that this strange girl's wild, free speech had, after all, only mirrored to her, in a magnified and distorted form, thoughts that in reality had nestled more or less composedly in her own mind. Had she not herself also once questioned of Judgment and Eternity, and imbibed some share of the materialistic virus so rife in certain scientific and literary circles? Yet the thing had not seemed so mournful when associated with those who kept a firm footing on the ladder of life, holding by its respectabilities, and clutching at its successes, as now it did, shadowed forth by the words of this young, weak creature; who, after all, had only pierced, by a sort of intuitive keenness, to a knowledge which Millie herself had acquired much more slowly, the knowledge of what a writer thinks about the Greatest of

Subjects, by the manner in which he often writes about the lightest.

But that which intensified Millie Farrell's emotion was the fact that during the last few months there had been a movement "upon the face of the waters" of her soul. Perhaps the first breath had arisen from between the pages of some great good book; perhaps from some very simple oral word; perhaps it came from out the whirlwind of misery and ruin which she had lately felt around her; perhaps from unutterable disgust at the recent conduct of her brother, whom she well knew to be a man neither God-fearing nor God-seeking. However this might be, it is certain that in these latter days a mighty If had from time to time presented itself to her mind, and disturbed that false peace which is as unstable as a city against which the heaving shoulder of the molten giant presses—when the earthquake is near at hand. *If* preachers and orthodox teachers should be right after all, and the clever, square-headed people of the world, who tangled their brains in seeking out sublunary causes through all the mazes of forces and physics, should be wrong; *if* the Bible did indeed enframe the only chinks through

which God's ways with man were shown, and promised, and reconciled with all we see around us—why, then, Millie felt that her life hitherto had been worse than wasted—it had been misdirected.

Men whose own souls are stiffnecked and stubborn-kneed, profess, nevertheless, a certain horror of an unpraying woman. A daring feminine doubter seems—unless, indeed, they wish her evil—a something to be mourned over, if not abhorred; and Millie, whose mental attributes were rather masculine, and who by life and knowledge was older even than by her years, felt a semi-masculine shock at Barbara Neville's free confession. There seemed something quite ghastly in a beautiful girl of nineteen talking thus glibly on the most awful subjects. Faith and love, and the bright sunshine of all truth, seemed the natural belongings of such a creature; but, oh, not the Great Negation, with its all-embracing shadow.

Meanwhile, as Millie wept, and thought, with a swift gathering together of ideas to one focus of conviction, a new phase of feeling was evident in the stranger. Her more selfish sorrow, however occasioned, melted for the

time into a sort of painful penitence—not for any bygone and grave fault, but for having been an occasion of pain and trouble to the one she loved and honoured. She knelt at Millie's feet, and kissed her hands, bowing herself abjectly over them; and if there was something of dog-like fawning in her actions, there was also the same dog-like faithfulness to hallow them.

"Tell me the remainder of your story," said Millie, when she had regained some outward show of composure.

"But do you forgive me?" said Barbara meekly; "do you forgive me for making you unhappy?"

"Forgive you! My poor child, I, at least, have nothing to forgive."

"You say that, because you are different from everybody else. I never vexed anyone before, who was not angry with me in consequence. Even *he*—"

"Tell me about *him*," said Millie, leading the girl back to the one important subject. "Who is he? what is he? and how long has your strange acquaintanceship lasted?"

"It began in the spring-time—and—and he is a gentleman—rich, I think, or, at least,

with expectations of riches; young, quite young, and, oh! so handsome! But I do not believe that I know his real surname: it was one of the tests of my faith in him, that I should not try to find out anything he had reasons not to tell me. He signs his letters Godfrey—and that is his true christian name, I know; for 'Godfrey' is worked on a handkerchief that he tied about my neck one night when I had been walking with him round the square, and the evening was damp and chilly."

Godfrey! It was not a very common name, and indeed it so happened that Millie had only known—and that but slightly—one Godfrey in her life. To him, therefore, memory reverted at the instant; and, doing so, recovered the lost link of association regarding the onyx ring. The truth broke upon her in one broad flash of light. The ring had been passed round her uncle's dinner-table for the examination of the curious, at a little friendly party some twelve months ago, Godfrey Sutton being the wearer! Happily Millie possessed presence of mind, and was able to conceal from her companion that she had made any discovery. By this reticence she but exercised discretion, as a charioteer might do,

who, having but weak and slender reins by which to guide a fiery steed, avoided an unnecessary and untried path. After a momentary pause, she said, with a sigh, "It was a sad thing for you thus to walk out with a stranger in London streets."

"It would have been more romantic, I know," replied the other, in a tone of bitterness, "to have walked, on summer evenings, about a terraced garden, or beneath a sheltering grove of trees; and it would have sounded better in a story-book. But with my arm in his, and his breath fluttering on my forehead, and his words sinking to my heart like drops of life-giving elixir—why, I should not have noticed the flowers and the trees, any more than I did the horses and the people."

"And was it then that he asked you to marry him?" asked Millie.

"It was then that he told me that he loved no one in the world but me; and then he drew pictures of our future lives, in which we were always to be together. He said that he trusted me fully, and only asked me to confide in him. He could not marry then, but oh! when he could, how happy, he said,

we should be! And afterwards, when he had given me the ring from his own finger, how often, as we were sitting together, he would turn it round this way, till it looked just like a wedding ring."

"I see, I see," said Millie, with something like a shudder. "I have noticed your ring, and I see how, by its own weight, the hawk's head presses inwards—inwards. But you say, 'sitting together'—did he visit you in your own home?"

"No, no. I could not tell the Fraülein. If you knew her, you would see I could not tell her;" and now the flush grew burning on the young girl's cheek. "Oh, Miss Farrell," she continued, rising, as if to give solemnity to her words, "I have taught myself to believe as he told me, that I was just as much his wife, as if there had been a gay wedding, with bridesmaids and orange-flowers, and all sorts of nonsense; and yet, when I wrote to him in my distress to come and meet me at the usual place this afternoon, he writes these cruel words." So saying, she drew a letter from the folds of her bodice, with a manner like that of drawing an arrow from a wound.

The letter which Millie read was as follows:—

"My dear Bab,

"I am afraid you must have been frightfully imprudent, thus to break the eleventh commandment—'Thou shalt not be found out.' Have you dropped letters about the house, or have the horrid people you mention set spies to work? Not they, without you have done something to excite suspicion. But what you ask of me, my dear Bab, is simply an absurdity and an impossibility. If we are to get on together for the future, you must understand this fact once for all; and it is better for me to tell you so by writing, than when you are by my side, to worry me by weeping and fretting. Now pray do behave like a rational woman, and remember you are not the first pretty girl, by thousands, that has been in just the same plight—yes, and much worse, for *I* am not going to desert the witch that has bound me with her spells. I enclose you a ten-pound note, that you may not be troubled about ways and means. But as for coming to London till after Christmas, the thing is impossible, as you would see, did you know

how I am situated. After all, you need not care so very much; and as for what you say about breaking your father's heart, why, hearts are tough things. And, besides, who would take the trouble to write out scandal to him? And if anybody were so mischievous, I should look for the mail packet to founder, as it did with your letter when your schoolmistress died. That was providential, I am sure; for heaven knows what rules and regulations he might have transmitted to England, that would have fettered and controlled you. Now keep up your spirits, my dearest Bab; make yourself as happy as you can till I see you again, and write to the old address, to your devoted and affectionate

"GODFREY."

As Millie turned the leaf in reading, a bank-note fell into her lap, and dropped thence to the ground; but, though Barbara was quite near, she only followed it with her eyes, and left Millie to raise it from the carpet. As she did so, the young girl exclaimed, "Please to keep it for me, lest I should lose it, and never have another to return him. I can only use it in case—in

case—" and incapable of shaping the phantom hope into words, she paused, overcome by emotion.

"My poor girl," said Millie, with mournful tenderness, as soon as she had finished reading the letter—"My poor girl, there is but one thing for you to do: this selfish man is unworthy of your love—you have been imprudent, no doubt, but redeem yourself by breaking with him at once."

A cry that was like a little shriek escaped from Barbara, and, sinking on to a low seat in all the prostration of intensest grief, she exclaimed, "The one thing!—the one thing I cannot do! Anything in the world but that!"

"It is the only course," repeated Millie, almost solemnly.

Again the little wailing shriek; and then slowly but certainly there came over the girl's mobile features a look that stamped itself there, and seemed to say with the eloquence of despair, There is another course, a dreadful and desperate one.

Millie read the look, and feared it a great deal more than if its meaning had been expressed in words. And, as she did so, a

Conviction, the saddest and darkest, took possession of her mind. Perhaps a story writer mainly owes his ability to a certain quick sympathy with human passion and emotion, and Millie's practice as an author might have served her as training to quicken the faculty. But, in divining the depth and the source of this young girl's anguish, it was neither with the heart of the Pharisee nor the look of the scorner!

Half-an-hour afterwards there was a tap at that bedroom door. Mrs. Blake had sent up tea for Millie and her visitor.

"Thank you—thank my aunt for sending it up," said Millie, as she took the tray from the housemaid. And right thankful she felt for having some refreshment to offer the weeping Barbara. For the girl was now weeping freely; but shedding the wholesomest tears she had known since she clung about her father's neck at their last parting.

"How delicious tea is!" said Barbara, as she put down her cup. And Millie rejoiced to hear the words; for, in the early part of the interview, a half suspicion had flashed upon her, to account for the girl's strange

letter and wild manner. With all her knowledge of human nature, she had not before witnessed a crisis in which hope, and fear, and love, and hate, and dread, and difficulty, produce the mental intoxication that looks like that of wine. Therefore, was she glad to hear those simple words, for she did know that the lover of alcohol rarely expatiates on the deliciousness of tea.

Another half-hour, and the visitor bethought her that she must leave. The clock had already struck ten, and she had heard its warning sound.

"You have saved me," exclaimed Barbara, as she clung to Millie, in the very abandonment of affectionate gratitude. "With your protection I can live—I can endure."

"Do nothing till I see you again," replied Millie, kissing her white forehead. "I will come to you to-morrow, God willing—early in the afternoon. Say nothing, do nothing till then—meanwhile, we must both pray for help and guidance."

"And you don't think I've been very wicked?" sobbed Barbara, clutching like a wearied swimmer, at the miserable straw of self-reconcilement.

"I did not say that," sighed Millie.

"Then you do think I have been wicked?"

"Yes!" But the brave word was spoken so tenderly that it lost its bitterness while ringing with its truth.

"And yet you are so merciful to me! I did not believe in angels, but I do now, and I think you are one."

"Hush! It is only Christ that can carry the strayed lamb back to the fold."

"And you, who are so clever, believe all that!"

"Yes. If I had doubted till to-night," said Millie, impressively, "you would have made me believe."

"I!"

"You! and you will understand how it should be so some day soon. Now, my poor child, good-night, I will see you down stairs. You say the cab is waiting? Does the man know where to take you? And have you money for him?"

"Oh yes, I have enough;" and the girl jingled the few coins that were in her purse.

And at the door, where they had so lately met as strangers, they kissed and parted.

Not three hours since the meeting—and what a life-experience had been shown!

Moving almost like an automaton, Millie turned to the parlour, to say good-night to her relatives. The room was empty. Miss Hardy had left by the last train, Mrs. Blake had retired, and Jackson mentioned that his master had gone round to a certain reading-room where the evening papers were to be seen. Even as he spoke, Millie's quick ears caught the creak of the garden gate. But she hurried up stairs, glad, so very glad, of a fair excuse for wishing her "good-night" by deputy.

And now she was alone in her bedchamber, with the key turned for the night. But how the room seemed filled with the presence of the hapless Barbara! Millie threw herself into the easy chair, and mused before the falling creaking fire, without account of time. Amid a long train of tangled thoughts, a review of her own literary career had place. She understood now the bitter truth of that accusation, already alluded to, that she had been an unworthy steward of her talents, though, doubtless, her sins were more those of omission than commission—always except-

ing that one article in which she had excused the avowed atheist and wife-deserter. Then she remembered the recently rejected paper, which she had slipped into her pocket when she left the dinner-table.

It was not very clever, she knew that; and she suddenly suspected that, had she treated the subject when she first thought of it, a year ago, she would have done so in a more sprightly manner. But with this thought came great thankfulness; the article had been rejected, because it was duller than her usual contributions, not because the subject was an evil one—a subject that a writer could only treat amusingly while his soul remained deadened to spiritual things. But, though below Millie's ordinary standard, it was still a marketable commodity—a good five-pounds' worth to her, if she chose to send it to one of those third-rate periodicals, whose editors so often and so perseveringly applied to her for contributions.

Five pounds! it was a sum sufficiently important to Millie Farrell; for though she was not without a little hoard of savings, it was but a "little" one, and in these latter months of her life, harassed by family disasters, dis-

tracted by discomforts, and perplexed in mind as she had been, the busy brain, so long without respite, had flagged at its work, and every guinea coined from its mint had seemed to be thrice hardly earned.

Therefore it was a sacrifice, a something laid by conscience on the altar, when she drew the closely-written manuscript forth, and scattered its leaves upon the glowing embers. Up they blazed, illuminating the room for a minute with a whiter, broader glare than it had known all the evening. The light shone vividly upon walls and ceiling, and brought to view more prominently than she had ever before remarked them, some ancient time-yellowed engravings, considered only fit to decorate an attic. Millie's absent gaze had been resting on one of these black-framed objects when the bright blaze lighted it up, and at a glance she read beneath the picture, in quaint, old-fashioned letters, the solemn words—

"Go, and sin no more."

And Millie Farrell remembered Who had spoken thus, and she fell upon her knees and prayed that for the future she might be shown how to consecrate her talents to His service!

CHAPTER IX.

HOME OF THE WORKING BEES.

"Fair virtue's language no translation needs,
Her words are works." P. J. BAILEY.

MILLIE slept;—yes, for several hours she slept that sound sleep which with some natures follows the strain of mental excitement, as certainly as it does that of bodily fatigue. She awoke refreshed, and rose even a little earlier than usual, so that she was dressed a good ten minutes before the breakfast bell rang. She was glad to have a little time for calm reflection, and to decide before joining the family circle—what she should tell, and what refrain from telling. Millie knew that her aunt was too well bred to ask questions in the vulgar, point-blank way; but Mrs. Blake had less refinement of mind than of manner,

and a consequence was, that she very often, by an unsuspected habit—which was yet peculiarly her own — dived after facts and opinions that were not intended for her knowledge; therefore it was that Millie felt she had need to be on her guard, and to decide precisely what barren outlines of information concerning her last night's visitor she should or should not afford.

She thought she had decided—to be discreet and to be perfectly loyal and faithful to the best interests of the poor girl, who had trusted her so fully; yet in truth there was a feeble haze of indecision still obscuring her mind, just enough to make her feel that she must leave something to the course of events; in common parlance, must be "guided by circumstances." It was in this mood that she took down her Bible, the dust upon its edges showing that it had been a somewhat neglected volume. But a new era had opened for Millie Farrell, and she felt prompted to inaugurate this new day by a new practice.

She had a vague impression that of all the prophets, Isaiah had written most explicitly of the Christian Dispensation, and she wanted to have knowledge for herself on the subject.

Thus it was that she opened the Bible a little beyond the middle, and her eye fell on the sixteenth chapter of the book she was seeking. Her attention was arrested by a single phrase—

"Bewray not him that wandereth."

She went back to read the context, and forward that she might not mistake the meaning, and then her heart rose on a flood of gratitude, and she felt that she had been fed with the morning manna, and was strong for the day. She closed the book tenderly and reverently—just now she was so fully satisfied that she could receive no more. He had spoken, and His servant had heard. All the haze was lifted from her mind, as a curtain of mist that is rolled away by the sunbeams, and she saw that her path, though tortuous, was brightly lighted. A fixed determination what to do and what to avoid, carries one on half-way to victory in every battle of life.

At the breakfast-table Millie Farrell did not affect a mystery or wait to be questioned; *àpropos* of the pleasant fumes of tea and coffee, she thanked her aunt for the thoughtful kindness which had prompted her to send

up-stairs the refreshing beverage the preceding evening, and she then remarked on her new acquaintance, saying—

"I have promised to go to town to-day to see her; I assure you she made ample apologies for calling on me at such a strange hour; but she wanted to consult me confidentially, and thought I could advise her, as I believe I can."

"Take care," said Mrs. Blake, in the worldly-prudent, maternal tone, "take care, Millie, that you do not get into any trouble with strange people."

"Oh, I don't mind a little trouble," replied Millie, "and I think going out will do me good; I have been rather too much shut up of late. And, aunt, if you knew where I have been seeking odd bits of information, the strange places I have visited, such as prisons and workhouses, Spitalfields garrets and London hospitals, you would not think much of my going to see a poor young governess, though she is so nearly a stranger."

"I wonder you were not frightened going to such places," replied Mrs. Blake, her mind carried away for the moment from the immediate subject.

"I assure you, aunt, I have often been much more frightened at fine, cold people, in a fine house, not to mention their fine servants, the most alarming of all." But Millie did not smile as she certainly would have done yesterday if recalling such bygone experiences, and she was conscious that her uncle looked at her, and silently remarked her gravity.

The "wisdom of the serpent and the harmlessness of the dove" are not altogether easy of practice, yet Millie had succeeded tolerably well, and by her manner of limiting the information she was disposed to give, had put a quiet *veto* on further questioning.

Millie withdrew to her room, as was her wont, with the hope that she might be able to write for at least two or three hours. But, alas! the hope was a cheating one, for all her endeavours to gather her thoughts into the required focus failed. The article she was about had already dragged a little under her hand; for days past Thought had not possessed her with a sufficient grasp to be proof against Clarry's interruptions, and the irritating piano-practising next door—still she had done something. To-day she sat long with the paper absolutely blank before her.

True, she retained in her memory the skeleton frame-work of her purpose, but she could not summon to cover it the appropriate diction which alone could make it live. When at last a few sentences presented themselves, they had to be deposed, like menials who had come to fill a master's place; and when, after some weary work, a page was found to be covered, it was so full of blots and changes, that Millie tore it up and rejected it altogether.

It was evident no literary work was to be executed to-day, and therefore she might devote herself entirely to that other work which was occupying her heart, and which seemed so clearly to be set before her. Mere pitiful tenderness and womanly compassion would have carried Millie Farrell a great way on the present occasion, but there was yet a stronger impulse guiding her. Since she had worked evil, she must now try to work good. Duty and feeling were yoked together, and drawing her on to action. She would make her visit to Barbara Neville somewhat earlier than she had intended, and thus save the poor girl the anxiety of expectation; still, she had time before her that she might devote to

looking over the packet of letters to which allusion has already been made. She felt anxious to know the worst, to ascertain if it might be, if there were other young natures to which her writings had been mischievous.

On this point her mind was somewhat relieved. What withered flowers of compliment did these old flatteries now appear?—nay, that simile is flattery to them; for, rather were they like the soiled artificial roses of last year's *fête* that never could have had a perfume to leave for legacy. There was not one of them as clever, as frank, as warm-hearted as, with all its wildness, was the strange epistle of the last night's guest; and as one by one Millie dropped them into the fire, she had the consoling hope that their writers were not of the stuff for which the "devil" very especially "loads the dice."

But there was the companion letter—that letter of rebuke which elicited very different feelings, and was destined still to be treasured—not burnt! *Now* she understood its meaning in a manner she had never done before—for wherever there is Truth, there is always an inner, and a still inner revelation to be made. Oh, how much it explained of

her own shortcomings, and of the stealthy influence of such productions, as some it mentioned, on ardent young minds! The letter was, evidently, from a clergyman, and it bore an address, but the signature had always puzzled her; for though the body of the letter was written in a fair, bold hand, the signature, consisting of a long name and a short one was formed of tall, narrow characters crowded together, till they looked like a bundle of sticks. She had sometimes thought she might have answered this epistle if she could but have made out her correspondent's name, and now the wish to do so grew to the intensity of a will. With a sort of reverent tenderness, she placed the letter between the leaves of a memorandum-book which she always carried in her pocket; and then—it being by this time nearly noon—she equipped herself for the expedition to town. A hasty examination of the contents of her purse, and a hasty look at her watch, and in another three minutes, Millie Farrell was picking her way, with quick steps, through the muddy paths that lay between Montgomery Row and the Railway Station.

She was very well acquainted with the

semi-genteel London district to which she was bound—a district which hung on as a necessary appendage to a fashionable *quartier;* and yet at a moderate distance, as if with a humble protest it pleaded its uses, while it deprecated obtrusive proximity. It was a district of shops and small lodging-houses—a thickly-peopled hive—the occupiers of which were mostly of the honey-bee, not the drone species. Here, enrolled as fit members of the colony, the "Fraülein" and the "Mademoiselle" had established themselves, making a home to which they returned for rest and freedom after the day's labour. I say "Mademoiselle," for Barbara was best known by her mother's maiden name, Leclair, which, though not always used by her, was, in truth, her own second baptismal name. Most of her associates knew perfectly well that this was not her true surname; but Mademoiselle Leclair!—it sounded so much more French for the French governess; and people who have their bread to win, are sorely tempted to trade on the weaknesses of their employers.

Then Barbara Neville was not without a certain pride in her father's family; and that well-sounding name had seemed congenial

with the wild, undisciplined romance of her character. Loving that title, she kept it for what she considered best and highest associations; and she had ready half-a-dozen excuses for assuming the Leclair for every-day working use—just as she did her second best and more serviceable bonnet and cloak. It was at the school where she had been placed, with the view of qualifying the poor lieutenant's daughter for a governess, that she had first learnt the sort of value attached to her second name; and when the sudden death of the mistress of the establishment tempted the wayward girl to seek a comparative freedom, by at once commencing a career as daily teacher, her few advisers, the worldly-wise "Fraülein" among them, had recommended her by all means to teach as Mademoiselle Leclair. The outline of these circumstances she had, the night before, related to Millie Farrell—who knew, therefore, how to enquire for her new acquaintance.

Millie was ushered by a slip-shod servant-maid into a dingy little parlour, which looked choked up with its only handsome piece of furniture—one of Broadwood's square piano-fortes. Every other article in the room,

from the dusty moreen curtains that shaded a very dirty window, to the crumb-scattered threadbare hearth-rug, and rickety Pembroke table, was faded, worn, and shabby; everything told, with a sort of dumb eloquence, of neglect and disorder, and of occupants by whom the sweet amenities of freshness and neatness were unheeded. A real feminine household fairy would have touched all with her magic wand, and, in the twinkling of a day, would have changed the aspect of everything. She would have swept and brushed, and scoured and polished, till the little old smoky looking-glass reflected—if still the worn and faded objects—a something besides; —a something that might be likened to the smile of a pale, thin face.

Millie saw all this at a glance; and felt the house-wifely faculty so strong within her that she almost longed to put things in order. But while she was waiting for Barbara Neville's appearance, she found herself speculating on the character of the German friend who was the established mistress of the little *menâge*, and could exist in such a home.

In about five minutes Barbara entered the room, advancing with so light a tread,

that Millie, who sat with her back to the door, did not see her till she stood quite close. Winter though it was, she was dressed in a morning wrapper of some thin washing material, but with a large shawl wrapped round her; and though her beautiful hair fell in long, thick curls about her face, it was evident she had not made any formal toilette that day. She was deadly pale, and with a dark hue about the eyes that told of tears, and sleeplessness, and of the iron touch of a grief that had entered the soul, as well as of bodily illness. The wintry storm and rain of the preceding day, and its wintry woe, had alike done their work on body and mind.

"I am so glad you are come," she exclaimed, stroking Millie's hand, as if she could not readily let it go. "I do not think I could have kept my promise much longer; I must have written."

"My child," replied Millie, "I am here earlier than I said. I did not wish you to be expecting me."

"I know—I know; only I did not think you would come at all—after you had reflected about me."

"Not when I had promised?"

"People don't always keep their promises."

"Truthful people, at any rate, try their best to do so, and I think you may always trust a promise of mine."

"Then you only come because you had promised?"

"Barbara!"

"I know I am wicked to be so ungrateful —do forgive—if you could understand how miserable I am, I think you would forgive anything I have said."

"I do forgive, and I can understand: but for every good sake, you must try to be brave and true, and to curb a wilful temper. Kiss me, poor child, and believe I am your faithful friend."

"And you have not told anyone?" murmured Barbara through her tears, a few moments after.

"No: and my mind is now clear on that point. Certainly, under some circumstances, it may be necessary to make another confidant or two, but not now; and you may safely trust to my discretion. You will do so, will you not?"

The girl bowed her head in token of assent, and Millie proceeded—

"You must write to him once more; but are you prepared to write as I shall advise you?"

"Tell me," said Barbara: and the words came forth with a sob and murmur of expectation.

"Is your repentance so true—are you so brave that you can tell him—if he will not marry you, that you will never see him again?"

The girl started from the low seat on which, by Millie's side, she had been crouching, and pressing her clasped hands on her forehead, she paced the narrow room like a panther chafing at its cage.

"I thought last night," she said, when the question had been gently and tenderly repeated; "I thought then, when you were so pitiful, and I was so angry that I hated him—I thought that, perhaps, I could give him up. But to-day all the misery is come back, and I am more abject here, than I was in your quiet room."

"And your friend has no suspicion what you are suffering?" asked Millie, ceasing for a moment to probe the wound to its deepest anguish.

"The Fraülein! I could die rather than

look at her round, icy blue eyes, and tell her such a tale. She has no heart—only a head. To hear her at the piano would let you know that, though she practises the most lovely music in the world, to teach her pupils. People about the school said she would take such good care of me, she was so steady. I did not know what they meant then, but I do now; and I say they were quite wrong. How can a person who doesn't understand you, take any care of you at all? If she had been like you, I should have told her the beginnings—and then—perhaps—who knows?" And the girl rocked backwards and forwards in a bitter agony, made up of mingled bitter memories.

"It is vain—worse than vain," replied Millie, "to dwell upon 'what might have been,' though, in saying so, I know, my poor girl, that I am setting a hard task before you. But if ever you are to have peace, it must be by remembering the past without reference to the failings of your erring fellow-creatures, and without seeking excuse for yourself. Like David, you must say from your heart, 'Against Thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight.'"

"One cannot be religious all at once; and how is it, Miss Farrell, you talk in this way? You never wrote such things in your books."

"For which I repent me bitterly."

"I am not sure that you quite need; I, for one, should never have read anything that looked preachy—preachy; and your writings have done me a sort of good—often."

"I doubt it," said Millie, mournfully.

"Yes they have—I loved you through them, and because I loved you I dared to write to you. If it had not fallen out just as it did, if I had even delayed writing another day, why, I think I know all about the end, and where I should have driven last night instead of to you.

'Take her up tenderly,
Lift her with care.'

I wonder would anybody have done that for me?"

"Hush!"

"Oh, do forgive me!" exclaimed Barbara, falling on her knees, and wreathing her arms round Millie; "oh, do forgive me, and I will

not say such things again! I will not do *that* unless you desert me."

"I will not desert you, I promise it sacredly; yet believe me, it is other help than mine which you must seek. But how am I to talk to you, when you shrink from what you call preaching?"

"I won't shrink from anything you say; and besides, your talk is not cant."

"And will you believe what I say?"

"I will try."

"I am not going to explain," said Millie solemnly, "how a true faith in God, as He has revealed himself, ought to pervade our daily thoughts and deeds. I only say to you, in an anguish of sincerity, that it is from that Great Light alone that any light can stream to soften such a trouble as yours. Make the first sign of sorrowing repentance and submission; and be sure He who has felt human grief, will help you, if you turn to Him. Barbara, you must write the letter I have described. You must keep to the good resolution, and we will take measures that one who has so wronged you does not force himself into your presence unbidden. Fear not him, or anything, except further guilt."

"How am I to live? What am I to do?" murmured the girl, wringing her hands as she did so.

And Millie was not shocked at the words, as a less clear-seeing listener might have been: she felt they only expressed the grasping at a shadow of excuse—the clinging to a straw for delay.

"I will take care of that," she replied, with emphasis. And Barbara sank her head on Millie's shoulder, weeping as if all her will were washed away!

CHAPTER X.

A LUCKY THOUGHT.

"An excellent surgeon he was at jointing of a broken soul, and at stating of a doubtful conscience."
THOMAS FULLER.

MILLIE FARRELL had seen "the Fraülein," though but for five minutes, before she parted from Barbara that winter's day. The glimpse, however, was quite sufficient to account for much that had happened. The dull blue eyes of the German teacher, though capable of brightening with a frosty glitter, were set in a face the features of which looked hard as wood, while the full square brow told of vast and much trained intellectual faculties. But a phrenologist would have sighed over the flat head, and the recession at that portion of the arch where wonder, veneration, and

ideality ought to have met. Evidently, this was one of those hard, logical, passionless, unemotional human beings, who, from a sort of physical necessity, possess health and strength, and, consequently, can use their very marketable powers with unceasing energy. They are doubly armed and doubly shielded against all the earthy, earthly conflicts of life, but they have no other armour for other sorts of uses. Often and often are such people chosen as the guides and guardians of ardent young natures, as if there were some spiritual chemistry, by which their superabundant worldly prudence would fly off, and communicate itself to warm, impulsive temperaments. Alas! it does nothing of the kind; it only sets up a current of repulsion, and the two poles of character grow farther sundered than ever.

Economical considerations, and not the elective affinities, had brought the two together. Nevertheless, it is not to be supposed that they had quarrelled. To make a quarrel there must be mutual readiness; and it would have been about as easy to lash an iceberg into roaring frothy waves as to put the Fraülein in a passion. Trifles could not dis-

turb her in any sort of way. The chief object of her existence was to make and save as much money as possible, with the view of retiring upon an independence to her Hanoverian home; and, provided there was no interference with her frugal plans and energetic purposes, people about her might do just as they pleased, secure that a hard, cold smile of content would dwell on her countenance—a glint of polar light upon the iceberg. Yet it is to be remembered that a breach of propriety, or contravention of even the bye-laws of society, in one with whom she was closely associated might have militated against her worldly interests. Hence, as Barbara had known by instinct, an impropriety of hers, if discovered would have thawed out a few cold but decisive words of disapproval. Thus it was that love and fear, and loneliness and poverty, had joined hands to enthrall and betray the inexperienced girl.

Millie understood it all; and, when she found herself again in the quiet of her own chamber, she felt as if, since the preceding day, she had lived through half a lifetime of experience. How light seemed now those heavy family troubles which had distressed

her so sorely—how sordid the petty hopes and fears which she had permitted a hold on her mind, beside such a fearful reality of life as had been laid bare before her! Her womanly compassion had already to her mental vision covered over the hideous ruin revealed to her, even as the soft moss steals about the rent walls that the lightning has struck; while an aching sense of personal interest and responsibility permeated her heart, to the present exclusion of all topics that were unassociated with the one subject.

But one may track and trace the cause of a great trouble without clearly seeing the way of extrication from it; and, perhaps, it was fortunate for Millie Farrell that no little enticing path of present expediency, which she could at all reconcile with her feelings and principles, presented itself, so that she was as it were turned from the very seeking after such, to rely only upon the might of present right doing, leaving the future to evolve from that course. Yet there was something strangely new in Millie's position—in finding herself thus suddenly a guide in that upward spiritual path she had so newly entered on herself. She felt the want of help, and

teaching, and strengthening, and knew not where to seek such satisfaction.

Was it to be found in her own family circle? Mrs. Blake was encrusted with worldliness, and so blinded to spiritual things, that the language it is necessary to use in speaking of them always seemed to her a jargon of fanaticism or hypocrisy. Her uncle? Some signs there had been lately, which Millie interpreted aright; and, perhaps, when she herself grew wiser, there might be advantage in opening out her soul's aspirations to him—but not under all the circumstances of the exact present, could she hope from him the help she might indeed be more likely to afford. Her poor mother? Alas! alas! when had she ever got strength from that weak nature? which just now was clinging in a satisfied manner to the strong arm of the unscrupulous, egotistic, and successful Charley.

Her friends and acquaintances! who among them could she reasonably suppose had gone "down to the depths," and knew the taste of the bitter and the sweet waters which there commingle? None, it seemed to her, of those with whom she was on habits of the

most frequent intercourse. No, not among the many good-natured praisers of those very articles which Millie now regretted and deplored that she had ever produced, could she expect to find a helping hand under present circumstances. Right well she knew that they would very soon look on her with a pity allied to contempt, would talk of her mental fall, and regard her no longer as one of themselves. No matter. Only, if she were to keep herself from the temptations of a false shame; from looking back on her past course, now that her hand was set to the new work, she must have some help, some sympathy. She could not give strength to the yet weaker, without getting supplies for herself.

Dear reader, you perceive that Millie Farrell was not yet an experienced Christian, fully acquainted with the ready ways of acquiring all spiritual help; but she pined for some human help with that human instinct which surely was not implanted in our natures to be always thwarted. And ever as she thought, and prayed, and pondered, her mind reverted to the letter of rebuke, with an assurance that the writer was one who could, and would advise her. Suddenly, an idea

flashed upon her. She would write to him, making full confession of the state of her mind; and, cutting out the illegible signature, would paste it on the envelope by way of direction, trusting to the proverbial skill of the post-office authorities to decipher its characters.

The plan must have answered admirably; for, on the next day but one, she received an answer, replete with kindly sympathy, in which the writer expressed his intention of calling on her at a certain hour on a certain day; and this letter was signed with a sort of awkward distinctness, "Wilberforce Serle."

Wilberforce Serle! Could it be that her correspondent was that young preacher, whose name, during the last few months, had been sounding louder and louder in the ears of the London world, and had not unfrequently been mentioned by her uncle himself! Certainly, if she had deciphered the name in the first instance, her courage might have failed her, and she would not have ventured to solicit his help. Or, if this had not been the case, the vision of his celebrity would have risen before her, and her own letter would doubtless have been more studied

and less spontaneous. Her face flushed when she found whom she had addressed; still, now that the deed was done, she could not be sorry for it. And yet her heart beat with something like that old tremor which she used to feel when meeting with those she reverenced as her elders and betters in the field of literature. But the present emotion was only something like, not identical with the other—it was modified by a strange consciousness that she would have to speak of things, the heights and depths of which pass out of sight of the ordinary topics of literature and art, science and politics.

The interview took place in due course, and some of its results may be gathered from a certain communication from the Reverend Wilberforce Serle, of London, to his brother Marmaduke, at Oxford. It is often a tiresome thing to read another person's letters, even with the receiver's notes and explanations; but, sometimes, they do throw a light on affairs, which we could hardly receive in any other manner.

CHAPTER XI.

LETTERS.

"Give me leave
To speak my mind."
SHAKSPERE.

LETTER FROM THE REV. WILBERFORCE SERLE TO HIS ELDER BROTHER, MARMADUKE.

London, January, 1851.

"MY DEAR BROTHER,

"I want you to help me—but, before you can do so understandingly, you must listen to a story I have to tell.

"You know what I think of the words 'chance' and 'accident;' that they ought to be expunged from the vocabulary as expressive of a misguiding idea—a nonexistent thing. Yet certainly when, one day two years

ago, I was detained by a succession of apparently trifling circumstances, so that I missed a railway train by a minute and a half, I did not duly recognise that those circumstances were really the little golden links in a chain, whereby more than one soul might be guided and influenced. I had half-an-hour to wait for the next train, and preferring exercise to rest, I paced up and down the platform. An urchin—the vender of newspapers and very cheap periodicals—importuned me to purchase some of his wares, and I believe it was because of his much asking, rather than from any desire to investigate the quality of his store, that I spent a few pence. Not that I was quite without curiosity to observe if any change had come over the spirit of this literary daily bread of the masses, since last I analysed its quality, and weighed it in the only scales by which such things can be tested.

"I cut the leaves, I glanced down the pages; in the main—to change my metaphor—the same atmosphere of thought prevailed. Yet, at least, the darkness was not more murky, and one could even fancy that on the far horizon there was a streak of struggling light which the very hopeful might take for a

faint flush of the morning. One article especially arrested my attention—an article which, though signed only by initials, was evidently from a woman's hand. It made my heart ache—it reminded me of so many sad things. Of a bird fluttering and bruising itself against the bars of its darkened cage, when there is a door, which it will not see, open to light and liberty; of a captive, loaded with fetters, set to perform some herculean task; of a thirsty traveller, cheated by the Dead Sea fruits: in short, it reminded me of all the sadnesses which are suggested when a richly-gifted nature, plumed for highest soarings, persists in folding down its wings, and tracing out life by the feeble earth chart of the mere intellect. Yet there was such an unconscious yearning in this writer for 'light —more light;' such a passionate pleading for the oppressed, such a strain of persuasion to virtue—though through motives wholly inadequate, and that would never affright the tempter a yard from one's path—that my heart panted to be up and doing—doing something to help, strengthen, or direct.

"I decided, while the impulse was warm, to write to the unknown author, and I think

my letter could not have been unsympathetic or severe. I wished the reader to perceive that I, too, had waded through the stagnant waters of intellectual incredulity; that I knew their benumbing quality, and the poisonous mists which they engendered. Yet I endeavoured rather to write as the brother, than as the newly-ordained priest. My letter was a little seed dropped into the harvest-field, with a prayer for the watering, and the ultimate fruition. Weeks and months passed by, and I received no answer, and duties and cares of many sorts made me nearly oblivious of the circumstances I have related to you. A week ago, they were recalled to my mind by a strange pathetic letter from the lady I had addressed—and, dear Marmaduke, the seed has not been sterile—it is growing—growing at last.

"I have seen the lady. Very curious, very sacred was the interview. Straightly different, and separate as is the evolvement of every human life, how adamantine are the boundaries between which all lives move on—how absolute and identical the moral Laws which govern every human soul! Truly, the second birth is the being born with eyes; for in the

previous mole condition the truth cannot be seen, and the lesser light, and the greater light of the Two Books shine out in vain. But from the moment the soul begins to see, it finds that these together make the pure white light that can alone reveal the depths and the heights of human nature, and reconcile the ways of God with man. It is this fact that seems to me a mightier 'evidence' than all the historic records in the world, mountain-high as they might be piled.

"But I must hasten to the point at which I want your co-operation. Through this lady, and by the wish of the poor Magdalen herself, I have been made acquainted with a dark history; one of those histories over which dull, frigid morality is always striving to throw a pall-like veil. 'Bring the bier—fling over the pall of shame—bury the dead-to-us clean out of sight,' cries morality;—but, alas! the dead-to-us are not dead at all. They live for a time to suffer with a suffering that does not purify, and under a crucifixion that does not atone; while tears of rage at man's injustice, blind the eyes that otherwise might have been taught to distinguish between purity and corruption. They live, and

are the roots of that Upas tree which overshadows all society. Hark to the words of dear old Jeremy Taylor, as wise a knower of man, and as sound a divine as I think could readily be found. Writing of the sins of the sexes, he says;—

"'In respect of the person, the fault is greater in a man than in a woman, who is of a more pliant and easy spirit, and weaker understanding, and hath nothing to supply the unequal strengths of men but the defensative of a passive nature and armour of modesty. * * But in respect of the crime they are equal, intolerable, and damnable;' and speaking of the judgment of man on woman in these offences, he compares it to asking her 'to fight against those enemies to which he had yielded himself a prisoner.'

"My brother, I tell people these truths from my pulpit, and I must act according to my belief in them. This poor Magdalen—I shall call her to you by no other name—is secluded in my house for the present, under the pitiful protection of my dear wife; and there she must remain, until I can find her a near and suitable shelter. Mine being at last the true home, the wedded home, I find my-

self in a hundred ways doubly brave and strong, and capable of usefulness. If I linger over my story, it is because I must come to a name which will startle you with pain. Your sometime pupil, Godfrey Sutton, is the betrayer of this poor girl! I know it past doubt; for, as you are aware, I am well acquainted with his handwriting; and, in addition to much corroborative evidence of his identity, I have seen letters to his victim. He thinks himself safe from all detection, since not even she knows him by his true name. I ask you, my brother, to confound this bad man, because it will be easier for you to resume the habit of authority over him, than for me to assume it. I ask you to confound him by demanding from Godfrey Sutton reparation for the wrong done in the name of Godfrey Swain. My poor penitent promises to be guided by me; tell him that she shall not see him again, except under the pledge of a speedy marriage. Hide from him her domicile, if you find him, as I fear you will, cruel and remorseless. She shall not be torn and tortured by his sophistries.

"You know the legend or tradition connected with the lands he looks on as his in-

heritance. I do not laugh at such things as superstitions. I believe God is always revealing himself, just as directly as He did in the early ages of the world. He has His chosen persons, and His chosen places. I have studied the curious history of those Sutton lands, and remarked that they have rejected great unrepentant sinners for their lords. Do not say that I dare to mount upon 'a wind of prophecy,' if I venture to express a belief that this man will never be the master of Sutton Court, if he so much as seeks to marry any other woman than the one he has wronged and ruined. Mark me, Marmaduke, it is *his* chance for redemption, not hers. I gravely doubt if, for her sake, I wish with undivided heart the marriage to be. He is not worthy of her.

"Well I know how the world laughs at great sinners becoming great saints. Let it. Let its ribaldry break into foam on the rock of truth. It is only from some deep gash of the earth that the daytime stars can be seen, and it may be that it is necessary for some natures to fall—fall deep into the gulf, before they can realise the hideousness of the darkness, see heaven afar off, and recognise the largeness of Omnipotent Love!

"This poor girl has been a week under my roof, and under circumstances that have permitted a deeper knowledge of character than I might otherwise have acquired in years. She is the most thorough epitome of the untrained feminine nature with which I have ever met. Taught only by the instincts of the heart, she seems to have a boundless capacity for love and self-sacrifice. Quick-witted to a degree rarely equalled at her years, when she seizes upon a truth she seems to soar with it to a more etherial region than that in which we had first seen it, and to there make it her own, and suffer it to expand. Yet when I first saw her she was almost as misinstructed in the things concerning eternity as the darkest of heathens, being in fact one of the myriad heathens of this Christian land, and consequently her rich capacities for highest knowledge had proved the capacities for deepest degradation.

"I may be in error, but I look upon this poor child as the type of a sisterhood whose bruised hearts bear a heavier burthen than is awarded to any other of earth's creatures. A sisterhood so ignorant that they know not the sweetness of innocence until it is lost.

The mistake of elders who look upon ignorance as an armour of protection, is a fatal and a cruel one; and I suspect it was a mistake the mother of this girl committed. I gather that she was a weak, vain, impulsive woman, veering from pole to pole in what she called her religious opinions. Dwelling in forms and ceremonies, but never penetrating to the soul of things, her apparent convictions were precisely those her child could never entertain. There was no life, no reality in them, no living seed that could drop into the heart and germinate there; yet one pities this poor mother, for she was a foreigner removed from her own sunnier land; and she found English life in the circumstances of poor gentility a sombre thing. She neither bestowed happiness nor was happy in her married state, and she made few friends. The husband was—the father is, I should say—a brave British sailor, far away, serving his country, the hope of promotion waning, it would appear, with every fleeting year.

"Picture the training of my poor Magdalen, and have pity on her. She loves her father, and associates his image with loving words and fond caresses; and since it appears

ordained that her sufferings should come through love, she is just awakening to a new anguish—a recognition of the anguish her fault may cause him.

"My brother, you now know enough to act for me, to act with me. See this young man, and spare him not. He has not the excuse of ignorance, of careless training; he knew the evil, and impiously dared it; to him, with troops of friends and all the wealth of mental resources laid out before him, the passion which to his victim he has profanely called love, could not have come with the same over-mastering tide as it did on the simple woman's heart, where it seemed to promise a new Eden, a shining sphere of love and life. Fallen as she is, she is purer than he, for her soul, though dark, was not corrupt; and as the Day Stream pours upon it by degrees, I see bleeding wounds, but nothing more foul than the average soil of humanity.

"I make no excuse, my dear Marmaduke, for giving you a new care, a painful trouble. If the soldier on service holds his life in his hand ready to be given up at the call of duty, surely we, soldiers of the invisible banner, must needs hold loosely ease and comfort, seeming

friendships and pleasant acquaintanceships, and be ready to yield them, or fling them away at the first bugle call that sounds upon the ear of conscience. On this point, my brother, I thank God we are agreed, much as we may and do differ about the fringes and adornments of the truth. To you it seems given to work among what my godfather called the 'wretched upper classes,' while I move in a different and a denser throng. I am content that our labours should be divided, so that each does his duty; and to you it seems naturally appointed to make tremble the betrayer of my poor penitent. Waste not words on mere assurances, but write to me when something is done. Dear Mary sends her love; she is with me heart and soul in this matter.

"Your affectionate brother,

"WILBERFORCE SERLE."

LETTER FROM MARMADUKE SERLE TO HIS BROTHER WILBERFORCE.

"MY DEAR WILBY,

"You see I have obeyed your behest, and not troubled you with a letter of promises and interjections, but have waited till I

could report something was done. I smile, too, for I am well content at the suspicion that I am growing into a habit of obedience to my younger brother. Truly, we mere students feed too entirely on the nectar and ambrosia of sublime theories, and need a little of the continued practical experience of human life to make mental bone and muscle. Truly, you earnest, active, parish priests, you youthful burthened married men, shame us sometimes. If we gather knowledge from the great granary by handfuls, you seize upon the grains that slip from our overflowing palms, and plant, and water, and raise the harvest, while we are still gazing upon our treasure as a microscopic curiosity.

"It was a blow—a great blow—the knowledge of my old pupil's infamy. I feared that he was selfish, vain, and worldly, but I did not think him dead of conscience, cruel, or of a nature to be led away by passion.

"Strange to say, I was last week a guest at Sutton Court, and thither your letter followed me. My position was a very painful one, but surely what would have been right to do in my own room at Oxford, it was right to do anywhere beneath the wintry sky that

then canopied us. It might have been a weakness, but I felt that I could not have freely spoken what I had to say within his father's house. Fortunately the day was clear and frosty, and my proposal of a walk through a certain district where there was not even a bridle path, seemed only natural and commendable.

"I did not seek to entrap him into confession, or to tempt him to falsehood; but I now think I ought to have come at once to the accusation, instead of leading to it tenderly by discussing the subject of marriage.

"'I wonder, my dear Mr. Serle,' said he, with a laugh, 'I wonder what has made you so sentimental this morning? A listener would fancy that you were the young gentleman that had to be warned away from the dangerous rock "love," and that I were the grave and reverend Mentor. I really think I can play the part capitally; truly, I can say I have never yet seen the woman I should wish to make my wife.'

"'Indeed!' I could not help exclaiming.

"'Yes, indeed,' he continued, 'and I hope my season of liberty may not be unduly curtailed. Certainly, if a handsome girl, well

connected, and with plenty of money, should encourage me to think about her, what I suppose must happen some day might be accelerated, but not, I think, otherwise.'

"'I am sorry to find you lay stress on money,' I replied, 'for she whom I am wishing you to choose has none. But then you have enough for both.'

"'What, are you wife-hunting for me?—That is an excellent joke! But, indeed, I must have money, if only to prove that the jade loved me, and did not marry me for the sake of a better home than she could otherwise win. If with other qualifications to content me she bid the market price of a title, I, not having one, might be satisfied of her disinterestedness, not otherwise, I fear, when the jealous fit might be on me.'

"'Is there no other proof of love that would assure you of its sincerity?' I asked, with a shudder.

"'No other that would be to me the least satisfactory, women are so artful.'

"'Hush!' I exclaimed, with suppressed indignation; 'revile not women, for that is the villain's trick—ever.'

"'Villain!—Mr. Serle!' he replied in a

tone of unfeigned astonishment, which yet had something in its ring that convicted him of guilt.

"And then I spoke out the whole truth as you have set it before me.

"My dear Wilby, unless God works a miracle in this man's heart, there is no hope of that one reparation which remains possible. There is a sort of blasphemy which the world scarcely ever rebukes, I suppose because it distils its poison through the ear, so subtly, that the soul grows deadened by it—I mean the calling deep sins by light names. Well, to this sort of blasphemy at first I had to listen, until indeed my heart sickened. 'Folly' and 'imprudence' were the sort of errors to which he at once confessed, taking some credit to himself for never having 'pretended to be a saint.' 'Women,' he said, 'know the consequences of such faults;' and when I pleaded the ignorant innocence of youth, and of this girl especially, he retorted that she must take the consequences of 'being such a fool.' He did not intend to let her want, but to marry such a person—the idea was absurd. Then, when he perceived I would not recognize light names for hideous evil, that I compelled

him to be serious, he was base enough to insinuate that she had been the temptress, and that he was most probably not the only favoured lover. You will believe the pain I felt at every fresh revelation of his depravity, for had there been anything in your letter to warrant such suppositions, Godfrey's first manner would have dispelled them. I could see that he was being driven from one subterfuge to another, and that he was hurling these cowardly accusations as he stood at bay. Wilby, you were right to choose me for the accuser: the former habit of respect and obedience prevented him from insulting and quarrelling with me personally. At last, when I told him that money aid for his victim was not required from him, and that it was not our intention to betray her domicile to him, he seemed startled and confounded.

"Then he became curious to know if I intended to disclose his baseness to his parents. I made no pledge on this subject, nor is my mind made up as to what I ought to do. I could not remain their guest with a heart so burthened, and I made a valid excuse which presented itself, and departed the next morning; not, however, until I discovered, at first

much to my surprise, that Godfrey Sutton had revealed his own light version of the story to his brother. I suppose he imagined that to him I should certainly declare it, and that he resolved to be beforehand in making the impression. On reflection, I see in this proceeding only an example of selfish cunning. He knew very well that the fact of his confiding this dark history himself to his brother, would effectually close Edgar's lips from revealing it, though I suspect it has not closed them from uttering sorrowful reproof to the culprit. Edgar has placed money at my disposal, and entreats that you will not refuse his assistance for the unhappy girl.

"It strikes me as noteworthy, that Godfrey Sutton has woven this dark thread into his destiny just at the crisis when to stand ill or well with his father might influence much of his future career. Mr. Sutton is beginning to suffer from the wear and tear of his active life, and is taking measures to withdraw, at least for a time, into comparative retirement. He would like to see Godfrey take his own place in the House of Commons; and, I suspect, however much the active working partners of the city house may relieve a Sutton

from excessive toil, that my dear Edgar will have to bend his neck to a yoke of business drudgery, for a term, at any rate; so that his ultimate position as a member of the firm may be based on knowledge as well as wealth. But more on this subject when we meet. Yours affectionately,

"MARMADUKE."

CHAPTER XII.

SOME PICTURES.

"The dark eyelashes, like portcullis spears,
Closed fast for ever o'er the gate of tears."
DR. G. WILSON.

I WANT to wind out the "dark thread" of which Marmaduke Serle wrote; but, alas! it has become woven into the lives of the innocent as well as of the guilty; and even when it shall be cut away, it will be found so interlaced with many destinies, that its influence will have become eternal.

"The fool hath said in his heart"—all sorts of folly; and among the rest, that he can see the limits of evil—that he can do wrong, and injure none but himself! Specious doctrine! that has sloped and smoothed many a downward path. By way of striving after terse-

ness and brevity, let us see what can be done in the sketching of certain word-pictures. But words have no colours; they can but depict in black and white, and they ask from the reader's sympathy that lens through which the scene may be coloured and vivified.

THE MARCH PICTURES.—A bright but keen March day. The slanting sunbeams glide like inquisitive visitors, into a neat upstairs lodging in the quiet street that leads out of a wide and noisy, busy London thoroughfare. Lighting up a portion of the little sitting-room, the broad beams pass through an open doorway, and show beyond a plain, but sufficiently furnished bedchamber. The chintz curtains are clean, though faded almost to a monotone of colour; and the carpets, though homely, give proof of sharp brushing. Seated at a little table, placed between the fire and the window of the sitting-room, is Barbara Neville, engaged with her needle; the little linen garment she is sewing looking scarcely whiter than her fingers. Her beautiful hair still shadows her face with its natural curls, and it hides the hollowness of cheeks that, a few months since, were rounded and rosy. One bitter December day had done its work

thoroughly. On the table is a little vase filled with fresh wallflowers—those velveted floral dowagers which always look as if they came with the violets, and primroses, and crocuses, to guard such airy, fairy flowerets.

Three minutes ago, the motherly dame who keeps things so fresh and clean, brought the flowers into the room—a little gift from herself—and it is this act of kindness which has just now called the tears into Barbara's eyes. The tears fall upon her work, yet she does not hinder them. Perhaps, however, but for the gift and its odour, her ears might not have been attuned to notice the street cry in the distance—the cry of "sweet violets and primroses—wall-flowers, three bunches a-penny." The cry made her quiver, it recalled so vividly a year ago. Then she was a high-spirited, ardent schoolgirl, full of strong, ignorant, unconscious desires after love and life—untrained, untamed, with the rich, yet dangerous sympathies and aspirations which, without constituting genius, belong to its temperament; with the passionate capability of heroism, and of any sort of self-sacrifice; with a capacity for any destiny, except that of the mere

"Live chattels, mincers of each other's fame,
* * * * laughing-stocks of time,
Whose brains are in their hands and in their heels,
But fit to flaunt, to dress, to dance, to thrum,
To tramp, to scream, to burnish and to scour,
For ever slaves at home, and fools abroad."

And now! could it be only a year since then, or was she enthralled by a horrid nightmare-dream, from which she would awake presently? Was it true that she was barely nineteen, and yet had lived, it seemed, through a half century of suffering? A year ago, she was so ignorant of the realities of life, and now she had learned what they might be so bitterly well! She had passed to her knowledge through a dark door, and stood in the shadow, the better to judge of what in human life was really bright and blessed. For her nothing on earth remained warmer-tinted than a soft, grey calm, which was the twilight reflection of that brightness she shall realise hereafter. She is penitent—yes, in heart and soul—reconciled to God, and, in a measure, re-reconciled to herself. Sorrow unfathomable, but not despair, is in her pale face.

Presently the picture is varied. The

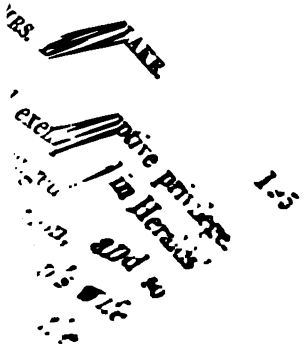
"Mary" of Wilberforce Serle, his dear, true wife and fitting helpmate, enters the room, and with the atmosphere of her presence invisible spirits of hope and peace make themselves audible. She greets the poor Barbara with a kind woman's kiss, and sits down near her to talk with cheerful gravity on many needful topics. From a basket, larger and heavier than a fine lady would have liked to have carried through the streets, she lifts divers little packets of eatables, portions of delicacies, hot-house produce, and other dainties, that have been sent as grateful offerings to the eloquent preacher. Little thought the donors, perhaps, of the ultimate destination of their gifts, and it is doubtful if they all might have approved of it. So easy it is for intellect to admire, so hard for the heart to be humble, so easy to envy and reverence Her who spilt the "spikenard very precious," so hard to yield the merest drachm of our own spikenard of self-righteousness; it is so comforting to think of a Father who would on occasion slay for us the fatted calf, but so natural meanwhile to feel like the elder son in the parable!

Clergymen's wives, if they did but remem-

ber it, have a delightful exemptive privilege. Orders of precedence were arranged in Heralds' Colleges long before the Reformation, and so it has come to pass that even a bishop's wife has no title, and is regarded as among the multitude. A clergyman's wife has not an atom of dignity to keep up; she may carry baskets of provisions to the sick and needy, and visit sinners, without let or hindrance. She may wear the shackles of fashion and worldly usage so loosely, that she can slip her wrists out of them whenever she sees fit; and just in proportion as she takes not honour, the capricious world is sure to yield it. She reminds one of the poet in the pretty German fable, the poet whose thoughts were in heaven while earth was being divided, so his portion was not allotted on the dust, but decreed to him in compensation beyond the ether.

Later in the day arrives Millie Farrell, and now the picture changes, for it is arranged that poor Barbara shall not be left too much alone. A light seems to return to the eyes so dulled by tears, and colour to rekindle in the pallid cheeks. Millie is the first true friend of her life, and she clings to her and leans upon her

"Mary" of Wilberforce Serle, [illegible] wife and fitting helpmate, [illegible] and with the atmosphere [illegible] visible spirits of hope an[illegible] selves audible. She g[illegible] with a kind woman's [illegible] her to talk with c[illegible] needful topics. F[illegible] s love heavier than a fi[illegible] of sympa- have carried t[illegible] ly recognised divers little [illegible] delicacies, h[illegible] how much her own ties, that h[illegible] ed, though she felt it to the elo[illegible] working for another. A donors, [illegible] packet that might lay in the of the[illegible] and was placed on the table, and migh[illegible] ssed Millie's fingers in recognition inte[illegible] at was all. Millie had forbidden fur- be[illegible] speech on the subject, and happily Bar- [illegible]ra was unconscious of the self-sacrifice that her friend was beginning to exercise. Some- thing like a terror at times crept over Millie's mind; long ago she had warnings of over- work, and the exciting scenes through which she had lately passed, and the change in some of her most important opinions, had been like a Nile-flood to her nature; she felt an urgent



literary labour, rest for the
for her to take account
ight be left behind;
sist this impulse as
beyed, and that
, she, so proud
ight have to beg or
tion by editors of more
recent papers, warned her of
henever she strove to disbelieve
e had sometime since lowered the
dard of the convenient toilette arrangement with her milliner, and had altogether given up going to parties this season; but the weekly help to Barbara, this little luxury she could not yet deny herself.

One more shifting of the picture before that March day closes. In the evening Wilberforce Serle himself is there. Yes, he has declined pressing invitations to hospitable boards, where the now famous young preacher would have been praised, and petted, and lionized to his heart's *dis*-content, or else to his soul's great detriment, that he may spend an hour or two in perhaps a more apostolic manner. He has books in his hand, and one of the objects he has in view is to reconcile

Barbara to her mother's memory, to show how Christianity dwells in Roman Catholicism like a jewel in the mine, and to point out how the poor mother's changes and shortcomings might have been owing to her unaided, ill-directed efforts to extract that jewel.

But he has tidings of some moment to communicate. A brief newspaper paragraph has announced that Lieutenant Neville, of H.M.S. ——, in the discharge of his duty, had met with a serious accident, by which his life was in danger; and though to Barbara Mr. Serle softens the intelligence as much as is consistent with perfect truth, she sees in it a valid reason that the painful letter which this kind friend had undertaken to write to her father should be still further delayed.

With all the sorrow for his suffering, a sense of relief, as she realized the "not yet," would make itself felt. Barbara understood now that there were worse woes in the world to inflict than bodily anguish, and the thought of *that* letter being written to the dead, even though it fell into strangers' hands, had been to her a less terrible idea than the realization of her father receiving it.

THE APRIL PICTURE.—The homely bed-

chamber kept quiet and shaded, but where a young mother pleads beseechingly for one more look at the still, cold, wax-like image, which tender hands are carrying for ever from her sight. That tiny grey coffin enclosed, I think, so much of love, the mother felt her heart grow chill without it.

THE MAY PICTURES.—White—white and gold—one heeds no other feeble tints that may be in the picture. How tall the figure looks as it lays there, rigid and motionless! Not graceful now, though almost grand in the sternness and silence of death. The head is a little lifted, and its outline is very beautiful, though the still face is more like that of a weary child than of a woman. The long, thick curls ripple below the waist, and though their fire tangle seems partly burnt out, their gold is not tarnished. They are so abundant, that Death cannot miss the one rope-like tress which Millie, half blinded by her tears, cut away just now.

Five days later Millie Farrell and Mrs. Serle are together for half an hour in those otherwise vacant apartments. They have been paying little bills, and packing away the few trivial personalties belonging to the dead. A

window-shutter is half opened, and ample light enters for their mournful purpose. They have donned black dresses for the day, but their mourning is of the invisible sort, and for a darker trouble than the change which is called death. The tressels from which the coffin has lately been removed are still standing, and the loose bed-room carpet is rucked into little heaps by the movement of heavy feet; motes dance thick in the sunbeam which penetrates through the open doorway, and shows the spot that now looks as desolate as a tempest-tattered nest. Truly, the motes in the sunbeam seem to mock at the stillness of death, as they turn on their little axes like tiny worlds revolving.

The friends speak softly, and in the pauses of their needful talk can hear faintly the roar of that human tide which just now is rolling obstinately westwards; for it is the middle of May, 1851, and the Great Exhibition of Hyde Park, not yet thrown open to the vulgar crowd, is in all the freshness of its mundane glories. They who "walk in silk attire" rustle through its courts, and all classes incline to shout the chorus to a trumpet cry that is blatant with many lies. It was the

carnival time of a false peace, and Englishmen let their arms rust while they shouted that there should be no more war. Ah! beneath the rigid lines of the iron-ribbed glass, or in the shadow of its influence, there was many a light, and many a serious wooing. Wives and widows enough have been made since then, who know what hearts may beat beneath the broideries of the—so-called—military dandies! And though they married apparently for waving plumes and carpet colonelcies, they found themselves entrapped into wedding heroes.

The tide of pleasure-seekers flows westward, and Godfrey Sutton is of the throng. In a carriage that seems to roll after, rather than be drawn by, a pair of magnificent horses, he leans forward to chatter the current talk of the hour to a fair girl who sits beside his mother, and he plays with the fringe of a gay parasol, of which, for a minute, he is permitted the charge. What to him is the undecorated hearse which just now obstructed the road, and cast a shadow on the street! What to him the scene that has been enacted within a few paces of the great thoroughfare through which he is passing!

Millie has a lighted taper and some black

sealing wax beside her, as well as papers and letters. A packet has already been made up, sealed, and given in charge to Mrs. Serle.

It contains all documents the friends think it necessary to retain, and now a last task is deliberately performed. It has been managed that some odd shillings only remain out of ten pounds for funeral charges. The ten-pound note Godfrey Sutton had lightly and guiltily sent to his victim, has been reserved for this especial purpose; and, with a receipted bill, that enumerates all the mournful items of the last attire, and the cameo ring that has been taken from the finger of the dead, those odd shillings are enclosed, and directed to Godfrey Sutton, with a few cold words of needful explanation.

Be sure he shall receive that packet duly and safely. He shall find it on his dressing-table when he returns from the World's Fair, to make a hurried toilet for a gay party.

CHAPTER XIII.

BENEATH THE BLUE SKY.

"Italia! oh Italia! thou who hast
The fatal gift of beauty."

BYRON.

WE must turn back our spinning-wheel, and take up that thread which was dropped on the blue waters of the Mediterranean.

Surely Leghorn is the bourgeois Venice of Italy! At the Tuscan port the sea-weed tangles about wharves and warehouses, instead of gathering round the marble steps of ducal palaces; and, where some sea inlet mimics the Grand Canal, broad, heavy barges make their labouring way, instead of the swiftly-gliding, swan-like gondola; but the ear is saluted by the same babel sound of different tongues; and oh, the same blue sky

springs its unfathomable arch to give the northern soul a strange new rapture!

At Leghorn Agnes Bendoran was met by a confidential servant of Lady Isabella's, a middle-aged man, who was growing grey in the service of the foreign signora. Antonio —his name being commonly abbreviated to Tonio—was a character in his way. In his earlier days he had been a travelling courier, and, indeed, in that capacity had been first employed by Lady Isabella. Now he was her trusted, trustworthy, indispensable factotum; and nothing could more clearly have proved a high consideration for Agnes, than the fact that her new friend thus stretched out her "right hand" to receive her.

In person Tonio was above the middle size, but lithe and agile for his years. A pair of great black eyes brightened his handsome bronzed countenance; and silver-threaded dark hair fell in waves about his cheeks, without concealing the shine of his gold earrings. Tonio spoke French and English, with a limited vocabulary, and an Italianized idiom that showed his thoughts were always minted in his own native Tuscan. Tonio could bargain in the market without cheating

or being cheated; he could cook; he could clean a house, for his rich Italian nature had received the graft of an English *pulizia;* he could use needle and thread with skill and dexterity; he could groom and shoe a horse; he could execute domestic carpentering on an extensive scale; and, in short, was a being full of impromptu wit and ready resources, a sort of human anchor in times of difficulty and disaster, a precious appendage to a travelling gentlewoman of adventurous habits. Tonio loved his mistress with the grateful fervour of the southern temperament; in which that something which under conditions expresses itself in art or poetry, more dormant, usually suffices to refine and purify all the emotions, passions, and affections. Tonio had recollections of a dead wife and darling "*fanciulla,*" who now slept side by side; recollections with which Lady Isabella's generous kindness, and tender pity, and strong human sympathy, were inextricably woven; and Tonio had twice changed his Director because the black-gowned "father" asked prying questions about the friends who visited his heretic mistress, and the names of her numerous correspondents. Tonio was

too shrewd and clever to be entrapped into any confession he had predetermined not to make; and the consequence was, he had long ago drifted out of the good graces of his reverend friends into the shallows which rendered him a suspected person.

Antonio's was the first foot that boarded the steamer that bright and glowing morning; and though, of course, there were the usual passport delays and difficulties of travellers to undergo, and much shrill talking, in which Antonio bore an ample part, he surmounted all trouble with an apparent ease that gave Agnes an instant confidence in her protector.

Agnes was leaning over the bulwark of the vessel, watching the heaving waters that seemed to say, "Hither we have borne you safely; step aside to face new scenes, for our task is done;" and she had not heard Antonio's brief inquiry of the Captain. Thus she was startled at being addressed by name; but, the next instant, Tonio announced his mission, and presented a note from Lady Isabella, by way of credential.

"The Signorina's humble servant—what would she to command?" said Tonio, taking up Agnes's shawls and travelling etcetera,

and arranging them on one arm, so as to have the other at liberty for a shield in a crowd. But Agnes explained she had nothing to command—that she only required to be guided.

"Si—si—Signorina—but *colazione*—breakfast—she shall be at St. Marco's soon—she must rest there—two—tre—four hours. And then we shall soon—soon be at Firenze—the train very quick, and milady, I know, so want to have her."

There is no need to tell how delicious was the chocolate—how admirable was the breakfast served up at the hotel, for Tonio took care that his charge was provided with the best of everything. No need to describe the details of the journey to Florence; and, to own the truth, Agnes was living just now too much the inner life of hope and fear, and strange expectations, to make full note of the scenery through which she passed. And yet she was not wholly insensible to it. It seemed difficult to believe that this was really October, the month that with us is the chill herald of winter, the month which breathes so keenly upon our garden flowers that they wither and fall—that snatches the shrivelled leaves from

our trees, and whirls them away with a weird whistle, as if they were so many tiny but disgraced banners—the month of a pale opaque sky, of white frosts, and rased fields, made ready for the sportsman's tread.

But here, in the fairest garden of Europe, flowers are still affluently blooming; in the towns children traders are carrying baskets full of nosegays, and for a few copper coins you may purchase handfuls. A trail of sweetness is upon the air for yards around the floral treasures, so fully has the bright sun distilled their essence.

The luscious fig—though likewise vended in a lowly manner—apprises you of its princely rights to homage, and deprecates with bursting heart the slander of its distant cousin that vegetates on English walls; the "lady with the thousand rings" showers down her wealth at every corner; and olive groves pencil their tremulous dark foliage on the scene, to solemnize the heart with sacred memories.

It was evening when Agnes reached Florence, and she could see so little of the fair city that she was only conscious of driving through various narrow, ill-lighted streets, of hearing the gurgling of the river Arno, and of

passing by the end of a narrow bridge that seemed guarded by dim figures, whose sculptured forms it was too dark to trace. Though the stars throbbed and burned in the sky, and invited recognition by their lustre, there was no moon to flood the air from her silver urn, and turn dim stone to argent—while the poor flickering gas-lights were so feeble and far between that their lurid jets were little heeded.

The carriage rattled beneath a sombre gateway, and then stopped at a massive portal, which stood wide open. Tonio rang a bell, assisted Agnes to alight, and instructed her to ascend the stairs, while he attended to the baggage.

Agnes at first could hardly see her way, though the broad bare stones were not wholly destitute of light. At the first turn a little jet of flame sprang from the corner, and showed dimly the frescoed walls and ceiling. Three hundred years ago a master mind had willed a scene, a master hand had touched those walls—and so the agile nymphs and riotous fauns had danced the generations down. Cradles and coffins had sloped their way—dames rustling in sumptuous attire had smiled on gay

cavaliers—pale girls of resolute wills had passed the last time down those stairs when the convent gaped to receive them — brides had mounted them when they were strewn with flowers—a tumultuous mob had trampled there on a detested banner, and a fierce soldiery had struck out sparks with their armed heels. And all the while the nymphs and fauns had smiled gaily, as if to show that even a mean Idea lifted by genius into the regions of Art dwells apart from the passing shows of life!

But it was a sweet living picture that greeted Agnes when she had passed the bend of the stairs. At the top of the next flight stood two figures, the one a young Florentine serving-maid of graceful mien, whose dark plaits seemed sustained by the silver dagger-pins that fastened some hanging lace; she held aloft a bronze lamp of antique mould, and might have realized a sculptor's dream of a new rendering of Hero. The other personage was a simply-attired, grey-haired English gentlewoman, in clined to *embonpoint* as became her "certain age," whose cheek just now was pallid from emotion, and whose small white hand was stretched forth with a gesture of welcome.

Suddenly Agnes felt her eyes swimming, and knew that as she ascended the stairs the light from the cresset lamp fell full upon her face. Yet she could not withdraw her gaze from the kind countenance that beamed upon her. Eyes met with that electric thrill which souls know when they recognise each other. Yet, momentary as the whole scene was, the emotion that passed through Lady Isabella's heart, trembled on her face, and, like a breeze ruffling smooth water, showed its mobile capacity of expression.

"My dear—my dear!" said Lady Isabella, passing her arm round the slight waist of her guest, and bending down the young face to receive her kiss of greeting.

Then ushering her through double doors to a wide antechamber, the hostess led the way to her own favourite room, and it seemed but a minute before Agnes's travelled-stained wraps were thrown aside, and the two were sitting on a sofa hand in hand.

"Food and rest are what I prescribe for to-night," said Lady Isabella, half playfully; "the much talk we will postpone till to-morrow. Only, my child, you are to understand once for all that you are welcome to my

heart—to my home. I am a brusque body, and mean what I say, and very generally say what I think. You must be equally frank, and tell me what you do, and what you do not like, then I shall make some way in building up my Palace of Truth."

"I, too, have had dreams of a Palace of Truth," said Agnes, with quick sympathy, "and rejoice to find my fancy is not singular. Dear Lady Isabella, I much fear I may be a trouble and a care to you—but at least I will strive to be true to you, in word and deed; it is all, I believe, that poor human nature can promise."

"My dear, you would not be true, if you offered to promise more," said Lady Isabella, pressing her hand, and she added—"I vow there is a story of the palace built up already!"

"How kind you were to send your servant to Leghorn to meet me," said Agnes, with much feeling; "it has made my journey thence so pleasant, so easy."

"It was better, I think, than going myself, but in truth I preferred receiving you in my own home. Ah! me, I have been so long abroad, that I daresay I do not under-

stand how strange everything must seem to you."

Perhaps these very words proved the thoughtful consideration which the speaker herself ignored, and without reasoning on the subject, Agnes felt that it was so. But we will leave the young traveller to her needful rest and refreshment; we will pass over the next few days, the letters to England announcing her safe arrival, and the first broad outlines of sudden impression, which she experienced on beholding the varied fascinations of the fair city. We will look in some ten days later upon the same room, and mark its pleasantness, and upon the same personages, and heed their sayings.

Lady Isabella occupied one floor of a vast Palazzo, renowned in the palmy days of Medician splendour for the wealth, magnificence, and munificence of its owners. To souls sensitive to such memories, such influences, every chamber was hallowed, or haunted, by the footsteps of genius, or the echo of its words. Tradition had stories of Buonarotti gazing from a window in rapt and half adoring admiration at the Cupola, which

he knew he could not excel; of Machiavel, the republican, who knew kingcraft to the core, talking his subtle talk within those halls; of Boccaccio reading his own Decameron—even Dante might have "climbed the stairs," so old was the edifice.

Strange, the metamorphosis of such a dwelling-place into the Anglicised residence of an English lady. Yet the transformation was not complete; it was as if the fairy's wand had been arrested in its broad sweep, and the willing genii had not been permitted to complete their work. The room was very lofty, and had a vaulted ceiling, painted in fresco, in pale colours, so harmoniously blended, that they never distracted the eye. The centre of the floor, now autumn was set in, was covered by a Turkey carpet: but for three feet beyond its border the tesselated floor of black, and white, and Siena marble shone cold and polished. The walls were well-nigh covered with pictures, somewhat irregularly hung; four or five of them being veritable works of the mighty masters—pictures with indisputable pedigrees, and denizens worthy of an imperial home. The remainder were admirable copies of immortal

works—admirable as copies—for if a copy even suggests the effluence of the original, it is something for which to be thankful.

Two French windows, which were shaded by the ample folds of muslin and ruby-damask curtains, opened on a marble terrace, the balustrade of which seemed cut in sharp outline against the garden's rich foliage. The inside of one window was crowded with flowering plants; at the other there sprang from a pedestal two feet of bronze, after Giovanni di Bologna—his spirit-stirring Mercury. It must be confessed that the room was a little too crowded with tables and escritoires, especially as book-cases, elbow high, jutted out from the walls. But who that loves literature and art, and indulges his taste—that lays a hand on the Past, while living fervently in the Present, can help the accumulation of books and papers, drawings and engravings, manuscripts and memorandums? Items which surely have a quick, prolific power of multiplication, that is always treading down the border limits, and asking for space—more space. The room was bathed in a soft, subdued light, the clear, bright sunshine being broken by outside jalousies,

and a silence that could be felt pervaded the place, as with an atmosphere.

Lady Isabella was leaning back in one corner of her sofa; and Agnes had seated herself on a footstool, so that she could look up at the face of her friend. The weather was cooler than it had been a week before. The undulating ridge of the Apennines was now tipped with snow, which sent its sharpness through the keen air; consequently, some logs smouldered on the hearth, and gave out the fragrance of a wood fire.

"My child," said Lady Isabella, with a gesture of affection, and meeting Agnes's upturned glance as she spoke; "My child, I know what is passing in your mind, quite as well as you know yourself; but I am not distressed at the symptoms. I have seen not a little of art and artists during the last dozen years, and I can perceive how the first comprehension of the gulf which yawns between respectable mediocrity and true genius appals the young aspiring soul."

"You do indeed read my heart," said Agnes, with a tearful smile. "Oppressed as I have been the last week with the very luxury of venerating—admiring is too cold a word,

—I feel my own aims so feeble that I have not the courage to take up a brush or pencil."

"So much the better. The needful courage will certainly come at the right moment."

"Dear Lady Isabella, how you comfort me."

"I wish to do so, my dear; but remember our Palace of Truth, and be assured I shall never willingly delude you with false encouragement. I believe your hand is sufficiently practised for the present, since it obeys your will, and waits upon your judgment. Just now, your will is unsettled, your judgment mounting like Alpine traveller from height to height; and whatever you attempted would probably be as chaotic as the camera's image of a shifting scene. Be patient, till your mind has made room for the understanding of what is greatest and most glorious in art, and perhaps the reception of this knowledge will be your first initiation into the Valhalla which now seems so far beyond your reach. You lament having had so little instruction in painting. Perhaps you have done better than if you had been fixedly taught low methods, which you would now have to unlearn. What you *ought* to have had, was the art culture—the art sym-

pathy, which is so hard to find in England."

"How the artist nature yearns towards Italy!" exclaimed Agnes, with enthusiasm. "I cannot remember how early it was that my own dreams took the shape of seeing Rome, and Florence, and Venice; and now that I am here, the reality seems a dream."

"This yearning is an instinct, I think," returned Lady Isabella, "that is implanted for far higher purposes than that English and Americans, Frenchmen and Russians, should be able to prate about St. Peter's and the Coliseum, or paint better pictures than they could have done without seeing Raffaelle, and Titian, and Michael Angelo at home. See how the Art pilgrims of all nations love this land! See how—to use the only right word—how Italianised they become! Surely this silent, practical homage is in reality more absolute than the most lavish lip-service towards a free and prosperous people."

"I begin to understand something of the feeling you describe," said Agnes.

"To my mind," continued the elder lady, "to my mind, it is the perpetual reassertion of a great truth throughout the civilised world,

the echoes of which truth are to be kept in continual vibration. I know that the most crystalline phrases—those which mirror a truth at every facet—have been dragged through the mud of common un-understanding usage, till they are sneered at for bathos, and, like worn coin, recalled from polite circulation. Thus, if we call dear Italy 'The Mother of the Arts,' we are smiled at for uttering a truism, by people who have never measured how much that happy epithet comprises; or else they talk of her as a dead mother of degenerate children. I suppose, Agnes, you have heard that said in England?"

"Sometimes. But when I heard such opinions I did not wish to believe in them; and, now that I am here, I feel that I cannot. But I say this without being able to reason on the subject."

"Feeling and inspiration," returned Lady Isabella, "are often with us women much truer guides than reason. In fact, I believe there is scarcely an error into which we may not be reasoned, if we close our souls to the softer, but purer, teaching. As children that hang about a mother's knee catch involuntarily her look, her tone, her gesture, and

keep the trait, though sundered far from home, so I often see that when northern genius appears, it reveals its true lineage, pointing to Italy for some antitype, whose spirit is reproduced, with only varying conditions. Take England alone. Her debt to Italy can never be summed up—no, not by all the clever systems of computing, which she has borrowed from the ready reckoners of the old republics."

"It seems to me," said Agnes, timidly, "that the Italians, so far as I have seen them yet, are more like the English than are any other people."

"Of course they are—brother nations. But the one has been made over-practical by over-toil, and his chilly clime has somewhat tamed down his poetry, his enthusiasm. But these break out sometimes, and show the kinship with a nation which, it seems to me, has been chastised for wisest ends—a nation whose promethean fire was once burning too brightly for the age, and which has been chastened for perfecting. When Italy shall be free and united, and grown wise by the lessons of adversity; when the veneration that is in the souls of her people is loosened from the dead

weight of superstition, and rises in the white flame of pure religion, I believe that the world will behold a spectacle of regeneration, of which the most hopeful can at present only vaguely dream. This is what my woman's heart feels and knows to be truth. I leave to logical-minded men to prove by their inductions that my intuitions are correct; and, better, I leave to time, that unmasks all shams, and wears away the stiffest steel armour of prejudice, to show who is right. I want you to mark one thing, Agnes; and note how significant a fact it is—the all but utter absence of what we in England call vulgarity. I make this reservation of 'all but,' because there may be specimens with which I have not met: but, according to my experience, the Italians are a patrician race, often very ignorant of book-learning,—quite illiterate not seldom; but still with a natural, quick appreciation of truth and beauty, that in slower races rarely comes, except by careful training. That they deserve freedom, I argue from the absence of all servility in the national manners; for, as someone has wisely said, 'servility is but despotism in abeyance.' They are polite, I grant you, but hardly more so to

their superiors than to their equals. Indeed, the slight difference is but the graceful recognition of law, and order, and individual dignity. I suppose you have noticed the freer manner of Italian servants?"

"Yes, it startled me at first," replied Agnes. "But already I have grown to feel that they are more like friends than mere dependents."

"Exactly so. I declare, the last time I was in England, I felt quite oppressed by the deferential distance of what are called the lower classes. How I hate the term! I longed for the glad greetings of my poor Caterina, her eager participation in my joys and sorrows, her soft *grazie* for little kindnesses, her warm kiss upon my hand. But, alas! poor Caterina was just then in grief too deep to accompany me to England; for she lost both brother and lover in the bitter '48.'"

"Dear Lady Isabella, in those eventful days, what scenes you must have witnessed!"

"Scenes! I saw the Austrians bring back the Grand Duke, and I think my eyes are still so hot with the glare of those long white lines, that I see nothing quite fairly yet.

Some future time, my dear, I will talk more about these things, when your mind is more attuned to the theme."

"Do artists ever come to Florence," said Agnes, after a short pause, "and see the things which I have seen, without interesting themselves in the people?"

"Yes, sometimes. But I have observed with such individuals, that there is generally perceptible a sort of fixed high-water mark of their capabilities, which you may be pretty sure they will never over-rise. In my opinion, there is a great deal of nonsense talked about 'devotion to art.' I should think a rope-dancer, or an Indian juggler, must devote himself with some intensity to the perfection of his tricks. But the acquiring mechanical skill is surely only the secondary aim of a true artist—the first being to encourage by every means and opportunity the free growth and upward development of his own soul; and this is never done by choking the channels of strong human sympathy. Therefore it is, my dear child, that I care not for the present how little you *do*. Fill your mind with thoughts of beauty; indulge your generous enthusiasms; grow in-

timate with greatness; and yield yourself to the influence of a land where I verily believe one inhales true taste, and the power of embodying thought by art."

"How your words strengthen me," said Agnes. "I have felt before now that my humble powers of executing have not always kept pace with the diligence of my practice, but rather that they have strengthened with the acquisition of new ideas. I see now the difference between the first and the secondary aim."

"Still, remember, it must only be the secondary. Manual skill does ask patience and practice."

"Ah, yes! but the hand, after all, must be only the servant of the will."

"More or less obedient, according to circumstances. If the artist's ideal does not continually soar into loftier and still loftier regions, we may be pretty sure it is only an image of clay, and not a winged angel. If he can really seize and imprison his thought, so that through the bars of his words, or his marble, his colours, or his music, the world can take its full measure, and see his ideal even as he sees it, then I hold that it is a slight thought,

and his ideal only a decorated real. This is why the true artist, though sometimes haughty, is never vain; though often exultant, is never satisfied; but ever uplooking as he faithfully follows

'That banner with the strange device.
EXCELSIOR.'

I don't believe Pygmalion was in love with the statue he had chiselled, but rather that he fainted with the rapture of the divine thought which refused to come into his marble, even as one might fancy a rose refused to bestow its fragrance on its mirrored image. The glass may reflect each tinge of colour—each wave of outline—but the soul of the rose it cannot snatch. We are thankful for the pictured rose that suggests what it cannot fulfil; but, unless the artist's thought is richer than his work, by as much as the flower which the bee knows, is of more worth than its image in the glass—the artist is but a diligent artizan, and not a God-commissioned creator. Little people are wonderfully articulate; they are rarely seized with a divine despair like that which tempted Michael Angelo to throw by his chisel, and leave his projected Brutus

incomplete. What a Brutus his must have been! We may be quite sure that we pigmies have hardly a dream of it, for all the suggestions of the rough block his soul seems just to have breathed on!"

CHAPTER XIV.

WOMEN TALK POLITICS.

"E stanca l'umana stirpe di chiarmarsi gregge!"
NICCOLINI.

SOME author—I forget who—says that the only condition in which a woman can feel really independent is that of a widow with ample means. Those readers who index their reading may be able to label the quotation. If the saying be true, it certainly expresses a very mournful truism, in declaring the miserable alternative by which alone the shackles Eve forged for her daughters can be knocked off: either the previous endurance of misery that was lightened by death, or a heart bereavement, that always seems to the imagination about the deepest anguish that can fall to a woman's lot.

But I demur to the truth of the proposition, as far as it is intended to deal with social independence as generally understood; for of course no one more mentally advanced than a spoilt darling of ten years old can suppose that even a despotic sovereign, untrammelled by parliaments, can ever, and always, do just as he pleases, and move in the orbit of his will, undisturbed by the perturbations of neighbouring bodies, satellites though they be.

Free Will and Predestination! One sees and feels how a great truth is tied up in the knot of that paradox, and one hangs it up, perhaps, out of every-day reach as a lamp of faith to guide us in a difficulty. But meanwhile, practically, we know quite well what is meant by independence, which is only comparative independence, after all; and perhaps it is about as teaching a task as we can set ourselves to watch how the frictions of the different volitions of individuals act upon one another, and thus silently mould those plans and purposes, which it would never have entered into the heart of man to conceive.

It is certainly true that women are cruelly weighted in the race of life, and that their

chances of free, fair development of individual character are infinitely fewer than those of men. According to the common lot, the young girl is passed from the parental house of bondage to the home which she enters, vowed to a new obedience, an obedience which ought to be her happiest condition of freedom. She is no longer "single," and can no longer develop "singly," for if she do, there can hardly be true union. Hopes, friendships, and interests are doubled for strength, for happiness, and for every sort of good; and generally speaking, a woman develops and aggrandises her own nature just in proportion as she has full and perfect confidence with her husband.

It is only, perhaps, by comparing women who are privileged by this loving confidence to look into the temple of a high, manly nature, with the weak tattlers who bring scorn on their own sex, that we can fully appreciate the many-sided gains of the true wife. Perhaps she herself hardly knows how much giddy gossip of inferior, and consequently deteriorating society she escapes, because the portico within which she habitually stands has a charm to keep off the silly herd. Such

women do not want the desolation of widowhood to make them free.

But there is another sort of freedom, the freedom of the single woman of independent means, and which may be hers as early in life as she has strength and skill to grasp her own life's rudder. Lady Isabella Clinton had done this at two-and-twenty; perhaps she had been propitiously placed to make the experiment. An orphan from an early age, her father's title and entailed estates had descended to a distant kinsman. Educated under the supervision of executors and guardians, her engagement to Captain Bendoran, the presumed heir of a wealthy uncle, had been looked on with approbation; and if ever the rich treasure of a woman's first, and last, and only love had been gathered into one focus and then blasted, it had been the case with her.

A terrible illness had followed the desertion of her lover and his marriage with another. An illness from which she arose, not, as is commonly observed, a different person, but the same woman with her individuality deepened, strengthened, intensified,—her whole character grandly developed. Youthful weak-

nesses and trivialities that in common natures often wear away with time, seemed to have been burnt out at once by the same furnace-fires which had tested the pure ore of her nature. Youth's brightest page was passed and turned in that May-day of her life, and love, deep, true woman's love, proved now obliterated from the possible of her future. Notwithstanding the trite sayings about first and only love, perhaps it is only the very few who, after such a sorrow as has been described, are capable of passing through the hey-day of life without ever seeking to re-erect and re-habilitate their broken-down ideal; yet Isabella Clinton had done so, notwithstanding the pleadings of more than one suitor capable of appreciating her nobleness of heart and mind.

The strong affections that perhaps in the more ordinary woman's lot would have deepened but narrowed their channels, had flowed freely towards everything she had found most worthy of love and reverence; and in the weary, perilous years of this mid-century, that fair land to which she clung with the filial devotion that Mind by right entertains, and the welfare of Italy's children, were the main objects of her interest and enthusiasm.

A broad rill of tenderness had, as we know, all along flowed towards the unseen child of him she had loved so well; but its current had been quickened by the tidings she had from time to time received from Mrs. Sutton, tidings which convinced her that the artist soul of Agnes Bendoran would be ready to participate in her interests and share her enthusiasms. Nor had the prevision deceived her.

After the first few weeks of novelty and surprise, those winter days seemed to Agnes to pass by with a swift and gliding pace. Like all constant, thoughtful, and well-balanced natures, Lady Isabella detested hurry and flurry, and the superficialities which accrue therefrom. She wished Agnes to fall into the harmonious Art Life, gradually and naturally, no more losing her hold on the strong, rich human life with which every separate soul is allied, than the lily which lifts its white cup towards the sky, and sheds out its odour like incense, can dispense with the rich, brown earth in which its roots are embedded, and from which it draws perpetual nurture. As we have seen, she rather encouraged Agnes than otherwise for the present to lay aside

her pencil, though the young aspirant did not, in fact, do so absolutely; but the greatest advantage she derived was, perhaps imperceptibly, drawn from the social atmosphere in which she dwelt. Lady Isabella was willing enough to endure pain and inconvenience, if by such means she could serve the suffering or lift up the fallen, but she had no toleration for rich fools or well-connected bores, for puffed-up mediocrity, or for even arrogant talent when it has got itself divorced from the heart, and instead of kindling and warming smaller minds, chills them and wounds them like polished steel. It was surprising how soon her friends discovered to whom they safely might, and to whom they really dared not give letters of introduction to the lady, who, to mere outsiders, seemed so capricious in her receptions.

For in her salon there met, on stated days and stated evenings, travellers from many lands, and of all denominations of Christian creeds; the wealthy and the poor, the high-born, and they whom merit had lifted out of the lowlier ranks. Even political partisans of many shades of opinion congregated there; and though warmly, still amicably discussed

grave questions in her sofaed recesses, or on the verandahed balcony, where they improvised a privy council chamber. All but Absolutists and Extreme Democrats assembled at her house, and those were excluded on the grounds of the obstinate extravagance of their doctrines. When people in the year of grace '51 talked of Henry of France and Charles of Spain as existing monarchs, or argued for the equal mundane rights and privileges of the individuals of the human race, she held that they were not the people whose tenets would conduce to the good government of society, and she therefore deemed it a waste of power to bestow on them the society of her choicer guests.

As may readily be divined, the good and the brave grew better and braver from the interchange of their ideas, and the weaving together of their sympathies. The timid, yet, perhaps, original thinker, took just measure of his own fresh suggestions, when he saw them held up to the light by friendly hands, and their worth discussed by vigorous intellects; while, insensibly, lives grew nobler, as the perturbing forces of mean thoughts and selfish aims were held in abeyance. Lady Isabella was not so silly as to doubt

the sort of influence she exercised as the centre of a literary, political, and artistic circle; but even she was unconscious how far its ripples eddied. It may be that her influence was immeasurable—as the consequences of all influence must be eternal.

When Agnes Bendoran indulged in introspection, what seemed the strangest thing about her new life, after the first few weeks, was the sort of calm force which possessed her soul. One can fancy that a tropical bird, cruelly hatched beneath northern skies, but, when fledged, suddenly transported to the Spice Islands, would, in its feathered way, feel something of the same sensation; a sensation of fitness and fearless enjoyment, of delight rather than of wonder. Noble aspirations, and a participation in great interests, were as natural to this young girl as a dwelling among the palm-trees is to the tropical bird.

If we look in upon Lady Isabella's morning room, when Agnes had been seven months her guest, we may divine the quiet growth which had taken place. All the influence of May, the flowery month in this the city of flowers, was felt and seen. The air was

redolent of perfume, and the light breeze that fluttered the long muslin curtains lifted, and changed, and mingled the odours, so that none were oppressive or overpowering. Agnes's school-girl stock of Italian had developed, by practice, to a very tolerable command of the language, so that she bore her fair share in the conversation that was passing with some Florentine visitors. They came to tell of a great, because significant wrong, which had been perpetrated, and which had heated, almost to fever point, the blood of a shackled and betrayed people. The authorities had forbidden the annual ceremonies which for two years had commemorated the heroic dead who fell at Montanara and Curtatone on the 29th of May, 1848.

"Rejoice, my dear Countess," said Lady Isabella, pressing the hand of the younger of her visitors with a matronly gesture; "rejoice, instead of grieving. Let us improve on Talleyrand's saying, and declare that political sins *are always* blunders. You are playing a game of chess with this hateful dynasty, and cannot really lament over the false move it has made."

"That is true," exclaimed the young

countess, with sudden animation; "and yet it makes us wrathful that our dead should be so dishonoured. But does Madamigella know the history? She is not yet one of us, like the dearest Signora."

"I know only," said Agnes, modestly, "that, this time three years, five thousand brave Tuscans held thirty-five thousand Austrians in check for more than six hours, giving the Piedmontese time to gain a battle; that you fitly call the scene of their encounter the Tuscan Thermopylæ, and honour the fallen as such heroism deserves to be honoured."

"Well remembered, well remembered, dear Signorina! But the number was scarcely five thousand, of whom many were of the newly raised civic guard, and they had only one piece of artillery, the ammunition for which did not fit. And the *Tedeschi*—the barbarians called their victory 'glorious,' and have named a war-steamer the 'Curtatone!' —*a basso*, I would not like to sail in it!—the Evil Eye must have scorched it! Well—Madamigella has seen the bronze tablets with the names of the slain, the tablets that are placed in our Santa Croce, and are

generally hung about with wreaths in memory of the dead?"

"Oh, yes!" replied Agnes, "and Caterina—the countess knows Caterina?—she is busy this morning weaving her garlands—for she lost her two dear ones at the Tuscan Thermopylæ."

"My poor Caterina," said Lady Isabella, tenderly. "I shall have a sad scene with her when this news is told. Each year she has attended the mass; and doing so has comforted her poor bereaved heart."

"Ah, the poor girl!" exclaimed the young countess, "let me see her, my dear friend. The lowly and the noble are alike mourners. She must know the truth soon. Let her see that she does not suffer alone."

Caterina was duly summoned, and in a few minutes she entered the room. As has been said, the Italians are too noble to be servile, and the relation between the different orders of society is, to generous minds, a much more agreeable one than that which we often find in crowded England. Caterina expected, as a matter of course, that her mistress should take an interest in her joys and sorrows—and, alas! the latter already weighed

down the scale of her young life. Without any hypocrisy to hide her defection from her ordinary duties, she was this morning devoting herself to her own individual pursuits. She had donned a black dress, which, however, was the most becoming thing she could wear, and formed the most appropriate background to the wreaths which hung upon her left arm, and the half-woven garlands with which her fingers were busy. For Caterina, half child that she was, had not ceased her occupation. She knew that her fellow-countrywomen and fellow-mourners were with her mistress, and she yearned to give and take the sympathy the occasion demanded. Her face was something paler than usual, till the flush of excitement heightened her colour, and made eyes that had lately been weeping look radiant as ever. Yet Caterina bore the ill news that was communicated to her with rather more composure than had been expected from her.

"Ah, well," she exclaimed, "we can pray to all the saints for our dead, whether there is a mass for them or not; and I shall go to the church, and hang up my flowers, whatever happens."

"As hundreds, I doubt not, will do," said the countess. "Indeed, a demonstration of this sort is justifiable. Don't you think so, dear lady Isabella?"

"Indeed I do. What say you, Agnes? Shall we attend?"

"I should like to be there extremely," she replied.

"Had there been the customary solemn mass," continued Lady Isabella, "I would not have presumed to intermeddle with the sacredness of the scene. But I think the case is different. I declare I am half inclined to carry a laurel wreath there myself."

In a moment the passionate-hearted Caterina was at her mistress's feet, kissing Lady Isabella's hands in a rapture of gratitude and satisfaction; pouring out her devotion in the sweet tongue that always suffers by translation, and indulging in that expressive action which, in Italians, is equally graceful and spontaneous. In a London drawing-room such behaviour would, no doubt, have appeared affected and theatrical; and the young countess, who had travelled, and was suspicious of English coldness, said something to this effect to Agnes—speaking in

her broken English, so that Caterina might not be pained.

"It is true," admitted Agnes with a smile; "but I understand how it is. In this clear atmosphere, if one is joyous, one feels impelled to sing, or to dance: if sorrowful, one gets the relief of tears."

"But surely I wept—no, you are right, I sighed and fretted beneath your dull, grey sky —and yet I loved the English; but I felt I should grow dull and grave, if I lived among them."

"As we English are vain enough to think we grow like you, when we dwell in Italy," said Agnes, meeting the gaze of her new friend, whose eyes were of the deep, grey-blue—often enough seen among the Tuscans.

"Ah!" said the Countess, with something of the involuntary gesticulation of which they had been speaking; "Ah! I see; you, like the Lady Isabella, believe the English and the Italians are marvellously alike, if only they are placed in anything short of quite opposite circumstances."

"And 'in the long years liker must they grow,'" interposed Lady Isabella; "or at least the likeness shall become more unde-

niably patent; when England shall take breathing time, and suffer herself to enjoy the beautiful, and a Free Italy shall show how practically she is skilled when the shackles are off her wrists!"

"Ah, Lady Isabella," said the young Countess with deep emotion; "I sometimes think you know us better than we know ourselves. And that reminds me of something. Tell me, did your young friend ever see the English poetry you wrote about 'Balilla's day?'"

"I think not," answered Lady Isabella, smiling; "but I might be able to find the lines, though I always thought them unworthy of the theme."

"Oh!" said the Countess, "they are so true. Madamigella can imagine the spirit that was awakened, by keeping the centenary of that brave expulsion of the Austrians. And all was so well managed, notwithstanding the trouble the government took to prevent a demonstration. The beacon-fires were lighted everywhere! Oh, dearest signora, do read what you wrote about it to us now. Madamigella will understand that Balilla was the name of the youth who threw the first stone."

"You shall hear my poor verses again, if you wish it," returned the hostess; and unlocking a drawer, she found a MS., from which she read as follows:—

THE ARNO ON THE CENTENARY OF BALILLA'S DAY.—1846.*

I've seen the summer moon stoop down,
To lave her beauty in thy tide,
And leave a largesse, quickly known
In broken silver, scatter'd wide.

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* "The expulsion of the Austrians (Dec. 1746) was the last glorious event in the history of Genoa, till the universal convulsion caused by the Revolution of France.

"They (the Austrians) made the Genoese themselves draw the cannon of which they robbed them; and, expecting to find in the Italians Austrian baseness and servility, they urged them in their labour with blows. A heavy mortar had stuck fast amidst the ruins of a narrow street, and a German sergeant raised his cane on a Genoese, to make him draw with more force. The latter, seizing a stone, threw it at the head of the Austrian. The people collected, calling out, not 'to arms,' for they had none; but to attack the Austrians with stones, &c., &c."—SISMONDI.

The centenary of this event was commemorated, more or less, throughout Italy. "On the circle of hill-tops that surround Florence, the fires leaped out boldly, as soon as the early winter night was dakr, despite the activity of police, &c."—T. A. TROLLOPE.

I've seen the poor man's jewels beam,
Each one shewn double in thy stream;
Those lights that in the southern air
Tremble like gems for night to wear.
But never did thy waters flow
So living with a sentient glow,
As when the Beacon fires upsprung,
Each answering each, with ready tongue;
Their ruby light lay on thy breast,
  Dear Arno of our Florence fair,
And showering down from east to west,
  The glow thou wert constrain'd to bear,
It seem'd to give thee human life,
  A heart to feel and ache with wonder,—
A memory to record the strife,
  And all the wrongs thou suffer'dst under;
And as thou kissed'st Tuscan soil,
Where Tuscan sons in summer toil,
Where mystic olive groves arise,
And vine-clad ways salute the skies,
Thy babbling pointed moral keen
Of what shall be, by what has been,
And had a tone of struggling clearness,
Like hope that told fruition's nearnéss;
And so my soul thy passion caught,
And thus interpreted its thought—

"The vine and olive, shiv'ring now,
Are duly learning how to grow;
And some day, in the coming year,
The land will laugh with happy cheer,
And wine and oil, profusely flowing,
Shall glad the hearts now winter knowing:

And so Italia's sons are bearing
The ills of winter, hardly daring
To show the sap that shall enrich,
And once again the world bewitch
With those dear spells that ask the light
Of Freedom's sun to work them right."
So murmur'd Arno, and she said,
"This spreading warmth, so freely shed,
Is token that ye are not dead,
Nor tranced beneath the hard, brute heel
Whose hoofish tread yet leaves you leal
To all the thoughts that gather round
The star of hope, in Night's profound.
'Remember Genoa's happy hour;'
I go to cry by Pisa's Tower,
And—where each faded fresco wall
Can still the gazer's soul enthral,
And make the Campo Santo square
Twice holy as he wanders there—
And—where the lamp, so finely hung,
For Galileo had a tongue,
And told the secret, that he cast—
Like herald sounding trumpet blast—
To all the wandering winds of heaven;
  And as it fell on wise men's ears,
  The listeners communed with their peers,
And knew a Truth to earth was given!
I go—I go—the ruby glow
Shall be a memory, when I flow
Afar from all these sacred fires,
That tell Italia's heart aspires!
And when my clinging drops shall part,
And with appointed purpose dart,

To fall upon the lovely breast
Of the most lovely Sea, to rest—
Like singing birds in mother's nest—
They shall renew their mingled strength,
And round the land, its breadth and length
Shall babble on, in accents clear,
'Be ready all, the hour is near;
Remember how the swordless hands
Of Genoa's children broke their bands;
And, by the ruby of those fires,
Be worthy of your noblest sires!"..

"Thanks! thanks!" said the Countess. "Is it because you love us so well, that you know us so well? and that the veils which so often obscure us to others are lifted for you?"

"Perhaps so," returned the lady; "for I am sure that unless we are at any rate inclined to like people, they involuntarily shrink from our investigation, like the leaves of a sensitive plant, and hide all the finer fibres of character. Besides, we should always credit people with what they ardently desire to be, before deducting their demerits. The nature of the 'endeavour of their lives' is, perhaps, the truest test, after all. But I am afraid I have moralised more than enough for to-day, and forgotten to show you some English newspapers, which I think will interest you."

"Ah!" cried the Countess, "about your Great Exhibition and the works in the Milan Court, which the insolent masters have dared to call their contributions, and have branded with their hideous double-headed bird!"

"Be grateful," returned Lady Isabella; "be grateful, my dear friend, for every insult. I am, I assure you. Insults only temper and harden the blade that is being sharpened for service!"

CHAPTER XV.

A POLITICAL INCIDENT IS ENTANGLED IN THE STORY.

"Due volte un raggio salvator il mondo
Da questa terra sventurata usci
Corsa è la notte, e dall' orror profondo
Spunto l' aurora del suo terzo di
Regin la legge ove regno la spada."

F. DALL' ONGARO.

LATTER-DAY political mechanists under certain despotic governments have acted upon the boldest principles. They have systematically dammed up the channels by which much of the effervescence of popular feeling might have been let off, and with, of course, the results that every thoughtful mind must have anticipated. When governments see danger in a party-coloured ribbon, party-coloured ribbons attain a new value, and acquire, so

to speak, a certain vitalising power. The leaven works more virulently when cockades are crushed out of sight, than when they are quietly paraded. The sword-like tongue of free discussion is a sharp and cleaving instrument, but the metal that is slowly, and silently, and stealthily beaten into the assassin's dagger is likely to prove a more deadly weapon, especially if accumulating wrongs distil their venom upon its point. It was, indeed, a bold blunder of the Tuscan government when they caulked tight and fast a great safety-valve of the warm-hearted, demonstrative Florentines, by forbidding them the public religious recognition of the band of heroes whose memory they adored.

Of course every one understands the miserable position of the vassal Grand Duke who had been carried back to Florence on a bridge made of Austrian bayonets. It could not be pleasant to him to contemplate the dear children of his paternal care glorifying the dead who had so resolutely opposed his white-coated friends, but even Grand Dukes must know that life often presents only a choice of evils. It might have been irritating to his temper to think of the tears that were being

shed and the prayers that were rising for his enemies, so near the silent, senseless dust of Machiavel; but praying and weeping have a wondrous power of softening the human heart, and satisfied devotees would have been safer subjects than a wronged and cruelly-coerced people. If the stir and sentiment of the day would have come between the "wind and his nobility," he might have shut himself up in the Pitti Palace, and moralized from those undying painted leaves which municipal Florence *lends* her rulers. Yes, there was teaching enough for him in his own gorgeous home, if he had but been teachable enough to learn. On those walls some notable facts in the world's history were illuminated by the soul of genius, and thus held high above the waters of oblivion by the painter's noble art. Not to mention works on the sacredest subjects that with display of reverent daring pierce "down to the depths" of the human heart, there are a few pictures in the Pitti which might have pointed a still readier moral.

Vandyke's Charles the First, if it reveals the previsions of sadness in the face of the not yet discrowned king, betrays also the

lurking deceit which was to conduct him to his hard death-pillow. Henrietta Maria, with the blood of the Medici in her veins, looks out from that Florentine home, and behind a mask of physical beauty shows the craft and remorseless selfishness of her race. There is a Judith, too, wholesome, if not pleasant, for tyrants to contemplate. For though a silken generation may choose to shudder at a deed of blood, her apocryphal story shines forth jewel-like,—crystallized to ruby by the red drop that is its heart—in the purest, and richest, and most gorgeous oriental setting. As in those old Hebrew times, so now, God prepares the instruments of his vengeance, but keeps them sheathed and often unsuspected till the hour for which they were forged is ripe.

Then those three weird women, old with the age that has no recollection of youth, the Parcæ of Michael Angelo! They lift the heart to an Alpine region of sublimity, and chill it with the sense of Pagan inexorability, till we need the neighbouring magnetism of Raphael the Divine to set the blood warmly flowing again.

There is a portrait of Oliver Cromwell, pre-

sented by the Great Protector of England to his contemporary, the then ruler of Florence, which, even after two hundred years, might startle thoughtless princes to momentary reflection. And among suffering saints and triumphant oppressors there shines serenely one of the noblest pictures in the world. The painter is Rubens, and the square of canvas he has vivified with mind shows the portraits of himself and his brother, and the two philosophers who are thus for ever associated with them. Amid all the suggestions of the mystery of sin and suffering that surround it, that picture, ever revealing some new charm of truth and beauty, is a calm assertion of the dignity of man, that might alone preach a sufficient lesson to rulers, capable of profiting by it.

But Leopold, the vassal of Austria, must have been long past learning any modern lesson of wisdom. Rulers who cannot curb and guide the airy something of this nineteenth century, which is like a high-mettled steed, are perforce run away with, and thrown by it, and the only wonder is, that this man, showing his unsteady seat in the saddle, kept it so long. To be sure, he was tied on, and held

up, but it must have been cruel riding sometimes; and already that May Thursday in 1851, when the mass for the dead at Montanara and Curtatone was forbidden in Santa Croce Church, his position was not to be envied.

Lady Isabella and Agnes, with poor disappointed Caterina, were in the church betimes. Deeply interested in the occasion, by the force of their sympathy they interpreted aright the prevailing sentiment of the throng which soon assembled. The Tuscans are naturally a cheerful people, though they have too much intellect, imagination, and refinement to be a senseless, gay, and giddy nation. There is a certain amount of dignity even in their mirth, and we may be sure, therefore, that the same attribute is not wanting on solemn occasions. I think the bright sunshine of their summer, as betimes it tips the slanting Apennines, draws off what the old writers called the evil "humours" of "spleen" and "melancholy," leaving them with minds better balanced to adjust the duties of life than are coarser-grained natures.

But during their long years of suffering and oppression, there grew upon them a habit

of checking, to some extent, the manifestations of popular feelings. With the noblest of people it must be so when heartless tyranny is exercised; and to do the Florentines justice, under such circumstances they never wore the mask of seeming serenity so firmly fixed but that it slipped aside sufficiently for any sympathising friend to see the true countenance beneath. Thus, though the large assembly which thronged the "holy precincts" of Santa Croce on that eventful occasion were disposed to conduct themselves with studious propriety, there were flashes from suddenly-lifted dark eyes which spoke to Lady Isabella of something like volcanic force; and there were compressions of firmly-chiselled lips far more significant of wrathful power than might have been a free babble of fierce words. Florence was wronged, insulted, and she knew it; and though probably the churchmen had nothing to do with the prohibition of the Mass, they came in for a share of the odium. But it was when certain individuals, and our Caterina among the number, proceeded to arrange their floral offerings about the tablets, that officials, disguised as ordinary citizens, interposed, intimating that no demonstration

of any sort whatever in honour of the dead heroes would be permitted.

The plan of the government was to provoke a contest, and unfortunately it succeeded. The people behaved very much as an English throng would have done under similar circumstances, rejecting, of course, such officious interference with their harmless desires. A scuffle ensued, but at a signal, a troop of armed men rushed from the Sacristy, where they had been concealed, and dealing their blows right and left among the unarmed multitude, a scene of terror and confusion arose. Some made for the lateral small door on the north side of the church, but here they were met by another body of police, while the passage that led through the convent was found to be occupied by a body of Austrian soldiers. Meanwhile, the first party of *gens-d'armes* advanced along the nave of the church, driving such unoffending citizens as they could before them, and then from the steps of the great door at the west end they began firing upon the people in the piazza.

Does this literal, unvarnished story seem too monstrous for belief? Alas! it is only one page, and not by many degrees the most

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great Angelo's wish, that from his tomb he might *see* the dome of the cathedral, the glorious achievement of his predecessor Brunelleschi, which he so enthusiastically admired;

the open west door,
to the other, we
phantasy was
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ps before them, and
ila had remarked made
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d. Still she did not appre-
of open violence; her conjectures
rned in the direction of new deve-
nts of underhand tyranny; and, bold-
earted as she was with the natural bravery of an earnest, upright nature, she was certainly startled and alarmed at the first appearance of the armed police. She had been so accustomed to traverse Florence without male attendance, she was so thoroughly at home in the land of her adoption, that it had never occurred to her that there could be the least danger on the present occasion. Even now, it was not for herself she feared, but she dreaded lest Agnes should be alarmed or distressed; yet a look reassured her, for Agnes Bendoran bore the test by which a great soul may generally be known from a

mean one. Her spirit always rose with the seriousness of the occasion, and now her eye brightened, and her cheek did not pale. By a slight—and to a nature less sympathetic than Lady Isabella's—perhaps not noticeable, movement, Agnes placed herself before her friend, as if she obeyed an instinct that led her to place her greater height and more youthful frame in the van.

Lady Isabella uttered no comment, though she saw the act; and, as her heart made a great leap of recognition, she felt as if their clinging love was a shield of protection for both.

"Turn round, Agnes," she said, speaking rapidly, but quietly. "We will throw down our flowers here in honour of Michael Angelo —that is not prohibited I suppose."—And, so saying, so doing, Lady Isabella, on pretence of leaning on the arm of Agnes, contrived in her turn to play protectress.

"Let us speak English loud and fast," she continued, "what you will—anything to make our country evident—for even these wretched tools know it is dangerous to harm British subjects. But my poor Caterina! we cannot leave her in the crowd. Are you

brave enough, Agnes, to move towards the High Altar to meet her?"

"Oh, yes, dear Lady Isabella; let us try. It would be cruel and cowardly to leave her!"

Happily they had not advanced far, when they saw Caterina approaching, apparently under the protection of one of those persons who had been most officious in dissuading the Florentines from affixing their garlands. Yet, on a nearer view, there was something in the appearance of the pair that belied the first impression. The man grasped the wrist of the girl tightly and roughly, and the tears that were streaming down her pale face, seemed partly extracted by the pain she was too proud to acknowledge. The man was speaking rapidly, and Lady Isabella distinctly heard him say,—

"Refuse, and I will denounce you, besides abandoning you now. Tell me truly where it is, and you shall be safe to-day through a forest of muskets, and protected always."

"Never, never," cried the girl resolutely, "I would die first:" then, seeing Lady Isabella, she uttered a joyful exclamation, and by a sudden start freed her arm. The man

could easily have taken it again, had he been so willed; but he made no such attempt, and with a scowl and a muttered imprecation, he turned away.

I think the brave hearted are specially protected; possibly because true bravery ever has its abiding root in faith—faith in the All-wise and the Unseen. Certainly, when Lady Isabella and Agnes, even long afterwards, looked back on the appalling scene they had witnessed, they shuddered at the retrospect, far more than they had done at the reality. The screams and cries, and crash of musketry which broke upon their ears, seemed to leave behind an undying echo, and the hurrying figures of frightened women, as they swayed backwards and forwards in the crowd, and the fierce, but subdued anger of the men, imprinted themselves on the memory in a manner not to be forgotten. By what seemed almost a miracle, the two ladies and their companion escaped from the church, and reached their carriage, without greater personal disaster than their dresses being torn in the scuffle they had had to encounter.

That night the Tuscan authorities removed

the tablets of bronze from the church of Santa Croce, hiding them for a while in the Fortezza da Basso.*

* "A cura del Municipio erano state poste in Santa Croce ai lati della Tribuna dell' Altar Maggiore due travole in bronzo, nelle quali erano inscritti i nomi dei Toscani morti nella guerra dell' Indipendenza. Nel 1849, e con solennità pubblica e maggiore nel 1850, i Fiorentini avevano celebrato con pio e religioso concorso la commemorazione anniversaria dei morti il 29 maggio 1848 nella gloriosa resistenza fatta dai Toscani a Curtatone e Montanara. Nel 1851 essendo state vietate le pubbliche preci, un grandissimo numero di cittadini si recó, ma senza ombra di preventivo concerto, e ciascuno mosso da un individuale sentimento giusto e lodevole ad ascoltare la messa in quella chiesa, ricorrendo il 29 maggio di quell' anno, che era anche festivo. La chiesa era parata; alcuni alzarano i setini che coprivano le tavole commemorative, affine di appendervi corone di fiori: gendarmi travestiti lo vietarono, ne segui qualche disordine. Allora uscirono gendarmi armiti che erano appostati nella Sagrestia, irruppero sulla folla; gravissimo disordine se ne ingenerò, molte persone rimasero peste e malconce. Fu fatto fuoco sul popolo. Nella notte le Tavole furono tolte del loro luogo per ordine del Governo. Per opera di alcuni pietosi cittadini quelle Tavole furono poi riprodotte, e mandate a Torino, dove il Municipio Torinese fraternamente le accolse, e le collocó sotto i portici del Palazzo di Città, accanto al Monumento commemorativo dei Torinesi

That evening Caterina related to her dear mistress a great secret. She possessed a sealed box, which had been confided to her by her betrothed, when he left Florence, to join the army; which box, she believed, contained the record of a death-bed confession of an English papist. The monk who had received it was the young soldier's uncle. He had secretly become a renegade to his faith, had been troubled in his own conscience about the story this record explained, and had confided the document to his nephew, deeming it safer anywhere than in a convent. The circumstances, however, must by some chance have transpired, for more than once had Caterina been accosted, and questioned, and threatened

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morti nella guerra della Indipendenza con la seguente inscrizione:—

'I NOMI DI QUESTI PRODI
CHE LA GLORIA DEL NATIO LOCO AVEA COLLOCATO
AD ONORE
IN SANTE CROCE DI FIRENZE
E NON POTERONO DURARVI PER LA TRISTIZIA DE' TEMPI
IL MUNICIPIO TORINESE
IN QUESTE TAVOLE CONFORMI PIAMENTE ACCOGLIEVA
AI DI 9 GIUGNO 1855.'"

Toscana e Austria.

with terrible, but unexplained consequences, if she persisted in withholding the information her persecutors desired.

"And now, dearest Signora," exclaimed the poor girl, when she had told her story, and weeping bitterly as she spoke, "I must leave you. I am not safe in Florence, unless I break my promise—my last promise—to my dear Pietro; and I will not do that. Never—never will I be such a traitor!"

"But, my poor girl, where are you to go?" replied her mistress. "Surely you will be safe in my service—under my protection?"

"No, no, dearest lady; even you do not know the power of the Church. I am not safe in Florence. I must go away, quickly and secretly, into Piedmont, where there are just laws, and where people who do no harm are safe. I have thought it all over long before to-day. I have an aunt settled at Genoa, who has often asked me to go to her. She is a widow, and keeps on her husband's business in the Goldsmith's Street. I could help her, and so gain my living. It must be, my own dear lady, even though I leave half my heart in your keeping. You will help me to get safe to Genoa—will you not?"

"Yes, my poor child, I will help you, if indeed it must be so. But what about this fatal box—what shall you do with it?"

"I must take it with me. It is not large, so I can carry it about me through the barriers. It is not to be opened till the priest dies. He is old, very old; but he was not dead a month ago."

"You know his name, then?"

"Yes."

"Will you tell it me? It might be that I could keep watch, and serve you."

"Oh, signora, if I dared!"

"Do you doubt my faith? Do you doubt my discretion?"

"Oh, no! no!—And, Signora," she continued after a pause, "I will tell you—it will be best so. He is a heretic, like you, therefore you will not despise him. Yes, he is a heretic in heart, though he wears the monk's frock and girdle of rope."

And then Caterina leaned towards her mistress's ear, and whispered low three phrases —a man's baptismal name, the friar's adopted name, and the name of a convent.

"You can hear from time to time if he is alive or dead," continued the girl. "You

can—you are so good—you will not be angry with me for asking you to do it?"

"I will do it, *mia cara*," returned the lady. "I will do it, my poor Caterina, for your own sake, for the sake of your faithful service, and for the sake of truth and justice. I promise it."

And Caterina kissed her mistress's hand, and poured forth words of gratitude and affection that were as sincere as earnest; albeit they would have seemed overstrained to any northern ear less accustomed than Lady Isabella's was to the demonstration of the south.

The next morning news was received from England, which so modified Lady Isabella's plans, that she had an opportunity of herself taking Caterina to Genoa. Before, however, we can comprehend the situation which prompted Miss Hardy's letter to Agnes, we must picture some scenes that were occurring in England.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN OLD ENEMY.

"Yet half I seemed to recognise some trick
Of mischief, happened to me God knows when—
In a bad-dream, perhaps. Here ended, then,
Progress this way."

ROBERT BROWNING.

MAY—still is it that eventful month of May, and the scene once again is in London. Elizabeth Hardy is standing near the window of her little drawing-room, looking out expectantly, and with an expression of gravity, amounting almost to sadness, on her face. Not that Miss Hardy is at all given to the listless habit of gazing out of the window, or watching the domestic proceedings of her opposite neighbours. She had occupied her present lodgings for at least ten years, and still remained in a metropolitan ignorance of

the number of bonnets Miss Brown wore annually, or of the average cost of the Smiths' grand dinner-parties. Even to-day, when a mournful unrest compelled her to watch and wait, it is doubtful whether she at all noticed the street incidents, until a hired cab, bearing a large box on its roof, stopped at the door.

From the vehicle there promptly descended Mrs. Blake and her maid Julie; and in a few moments Clara was in her cousin's arms. Yet, though the greeting was kind and affectionate, it was strangely silent. Something seemed to choke the utterance of the truthful, open-hearted hostess.

"My dear Beta," exclaimed Mrs. Blake, as soon as Julie, in charge of divers packages, had withdrawn to another room; "my dear Beta, how dreadfully grave you are. For goodness' sake, don't scold and lecture me to-day, when I want my spirits kept up, and my nerves strung to the steadiest pitch. I know all you can possibly say—that to-day you give me a morsel of dinner at three o'clock, under protest that if you could have your will, you would first ask leave of my husband to connive at my shocking doings—my wicked purpose of coming out on the

stage, though under a fictitious name, with a view of adding hundreds a-year to our starvation income."

"Indeed, Clara," said Miss Hardy, with a gentle sigh, "I do not wish to trouble or depress you at such a time; and I think I should have been cruel to refuse you this small kindness—though I do disapprove of your taking this step in secret and mystery, and unsanctioned by your husband."

"Well, well. Some day he shall know that if your sort of advice could have swayed me, it was not wanting."

"What he thinks of me, Clara, is of very little moment. However, the die is cast, and we will not discuss the subject any more to-day. What time must you leave here?"

"About half-past five, so as to be at the theatre by six, and have an hour to dress; for I go on nearly at the beginning of the play. I hope the whole thing will be over in time for me to catch the ten o'clock train. I shall return tired and sleepy, of course, and shall tell nothing till I have seen to-morrow's papers. Now, will it not be the truth that I have spent the day with you?"

Elizabeth Hardy neither spoke nor signed

an answer; only her teeth visibly pressed down her lip, and left their impress for a second there.

"With all your strictness and particularity," continued Mrs. Blake, "I am sure, Beta, you don't know what you yourself might have done if you had been poor, instead of always having had a couple of hundred a year—which really seems as much money as you ever seemed to want. You should not be so harsh and unfeeling to one who has had such troubles as I have."

"Clara, what have I said? It is you who are putting words into my mouth, and lashing yourself up to anger and irritability. Come, take off your bonnet. Dinner will be ready immediately; and, afterwards, you shall rest on the sofa, preparatory to the fatigues of the evening."

And thus she did; but there is often a perversity in human affairs, with which the wisest of us are unable to cope. We may put the poor body in an attitude of repose, but true rest is sometimes as coy of coming at our call as sleep itself. The *debutante* certainly needed an interval of composure and tranquillity, and her cousin did her best to

bestow it. Yet, if for a few seconds the room was so still that the ear only caught the tick-tick of the clock on the mantel-piece, Mrs. Blake was sure to break out in a monologue discourse, or to raise herself up to readjust the sofa cushions. In truth, she seemed possessed by a demon of excitability, that was exhausting the strength and energy, of which, in a few hours, she would stand so much in need.

Miss Hardy grew more and more pained and distressed; and, after awhile, she rose to leave the room, believing that solitude would afford the best chance of repose for Mrs. Blake. But Clara seemed to dread being thrown entirely on herself; for she exclaimed, eagerly,

"Beta, don't leave me—pray don't. I would rather you stayed and scolded me, than went away, or said nothing. No doubt there has been more than one crisis in my life more important than this; and yet I never quite felt how much of my existence was hanging on a few hours. Come and kiss me, Beta. Now, don't cry. You can control yourself if you like, and you must do so now, Beta. I wish I were as good as you.

I do from the bottom of my heart. So many things would be different if I were. And I almost wish I had taken your advice, and had asked Compton's consent to this step."

"Dear, dear Clara!" cried Miss Hardy, "it is not yet too late to profit by these better second thoughts. Put off the acting to-night, and break the scheme to your husband."

"And pay twenty, or fifty pounds, perhaps, for not keeping my engagement! Why, I have hardly the control of as many shillings."

"But I have," said Miss Hardy; "and I will cheerfully pay any forfeit you may incur."

"And impoverish yourself to do it! No, no, it is too late now. As you said, the die is cast. And, besides, suppose Compton should be horrified at the idea. Then there would be nothing left for me, but to curl myself up like a sick snail in its shell, and to be the drudging, poor man's wife to the end of my days."

"But, Clara, nothing can be so bad as your husband's displeasure when he comes to know the fact."

"He will not know it till my success is established; and that will make such a difference! I do not see how he can possibly be angry then. Whereas if—*if* I fail, the mortification and disappointment will be only mine."

"But suppose you should be recognised?" continued Miss Hardy.

"The thing is next to impossible—I shall be so painted and disguised for the melodramatic character I am going to represent. And, besides, I am sure none of my old acquaintances ever think of going to places of amusement so far east as the Parthenon Theatre. Beta, I say again, scold me if you like, but don't be a croaking raven, there's a dear."

Surely it was only such a disciplined nature as that of Elizabeth Hardy which could have borne this wayward fretfulness without any visible fray or audible murmur of its own temper. But if there were not in the world a few fine souls, dowered with the faculties of self-denial, self-conquest, and forbearance, faculties which they have disciplined to soldier-like obedience, earth would be everywhere a battle-field of perpetual contention.

If we could look, Asmodeus-like, into varied homes, and watch the play of petty passions from the rude nursery-chamber where the tyrant of five years old lords it over the trembling little sister, to the haunts of the aged where the senile iris still flashes forth selfish, unreasoning commands, we should know how much we owe to those moral dams which hold back the waters of strife, and so keep pure and calm some little inlets from the river of life, as pools apart to reflect the sunshine and stars of heaven.

Miss Hardy had not intended to accompany Mrs. Blake to the theatre. The step Clara was taking was so repugnant to her feelings that she shrank from sanctioning it by her presence; but when she heard that the poor *debûtante* would have no friend but her maid by her side,—Madame B——, who had been the go-between with the manager and arranger of the whole proceeding, having to sing herself that night elsewhere—Beta's kind heart began to yield; yet it was not till the cab was at the door and Clara was taking her *café noir* that Miss Hardy threw on her bonnet and shawl, determining not to desert her cousin in the hour of trial.

Miss Hardy, not much of a play-goer at any time, had never before seen anything of the arcana of a theatre, and was in a state of tranquil ignorance concerning the mysteries of the histrionic life. She knew something of the studios of painters and sculptors, in which there need never be anything to depress the imagination or to unidealize art; and though she did not expect the same sort of mental atmosphere behind the scenes of a theatre, she was unprepared for the sudden fall of her fancy. To pass out of the soft summer sunshine into dusty, dingy passages, where flaring gas supplements the feeble daylight, is itself like passing from music to discord; and as certain rough substances have the faculty of attracting and retaining the floating particles of dirt which would easily slip off more polished surfaces, so it does appear that now-a-days the acted drama exercises a spell in attracting atoms of incongruity which blur its beauty, and by their dead weight drag it down from the pedestal of art, on which it ought to rest. Oh, why will not the moderns have faith in the power of a poet's words, and in apt delineations of human passions, which always touch the collective heart of the world,

and trust less to the tinsel and the glare, which, disturbing the stand-point of the spectator's imagination, deprive it of the power of unfurling its wings?

How wretched an affair is a scene-painter's garden, even if viewed from the centre box; think how hideous its roses look when examined at the distance of a yard! A wearied and soul-sick ballet girl may have beauty to the mind, which is insensible to loveliness of a loftier order, and which finds it pleasant to sink its taste by simply obeying the law of its own moral gravitation; but the cheek whose hollows are artfully hid, and the eye that is bright only from eager excitement, raise a sigh to the lips of a woman like Elizabeth Hardy. She was too generous to regret that she had come to this frightful place that night, but she wished with a desire that was like a craving, that even at this moment she could wrap poor Clara in the mantle of her protection, and bear her away—anywhere away from the spot.

But the minutes crept on with a seemingly cruel precision, and Beta watched the theatrical toilette of her cousin with a sick flutter of the heart. The dress Clara assumed was

that of a peasant girl, pink being its prevailing colour; and there was the inevitable stage chemisette, with the due quantity of black velvet strappings. Her hair was fantastically dressed, her cheeks were rouged to the stage focus—a fiery pitch—and her forehead was duly whitened. A *soupçon* of black chalk deepened the lines of her well-marked eyebrows, and a spot of red on the chin brought out the contour of the face marvellously. The anxious glare that was to-night the prevailing expression of poor Clara's face was only too readily accounted for, but the look and the paint, the fantastic form of the hair, so like that which Isidore had adopted one fatal night, startled Miss Hardy to a painful recollection. Perhaps even the hue of the dress might help the travesty, for each separate atom of circumstance combined with the rest to render Mrs. Blake's appearance a caricature of her own sad self nearly a year ago, when, with a fortitude worthy of a better cause, she had chained down the tokens of the grim terrors that were possessing her mind, had forced her poor painted face to smile gay greetings to her hundreds of guests, and taught the voice that wanted to moan forth its appre-

hensions, to utter coherent common-places, and command its wailing impulse.

Faint, heart-sick, dizzy with a distress that only permitted tears to flow scantily and at intervals, Elizabeth Hardy leaned her head against the scenery where it jutted back beyond the ken of the audience. Already initiated into the theatrical mysteries of prompter and call-boy, she had accompanied Clara to the last limit of obscurity and privacy, and now she was watching her as she moved and spoke on the open stage, with an anxiety tempered by astonishment.

Perhaps Clara had made the *debûtante's* mistake of pitching the passion of the character she was representing in so high a key at the beginning of the performance, that she could hardly have in reserve further octaves of expression on which to rise as the play proceeded, or perhaps it was only poor Beta's inexperience that made her feel surprise at her cousin's self-possession and apparent ease in her new position. She did not quite understand the sort of fear that finds no protecting visor to fit it but that of assumed boldness.

The first scene of the melodrama went off in a highly satisfactory manner. Gloved

hands in the boxes and bare hands in the pit and gallery clapped out the music so sweet to the public performer; and though two or three individuals scattered about the house, and known to be connected with the press, sat with their arms ominously folded, the manager, who had ways of spying the semi-circle of faces, hoped that the professional critics, whatever their individual demurrings, would be constrained to own that the new actress, Miss Eugenia Beaufort, had been enthusiastically received by a crowded audience. He knew how invigorating was the first quaffing of the cup of success, and therefore he did not tell Clara to how many of his reliable personal friends he had given free admissions for that night. He reserved such a piece of information to be communicated in case she should, in a financial point of view, presume too much on this first night's apparent success. For himself, he was gracious to the *debûtante*, was ready at the wing to hand her into the green-room, and accompanied his courtesy with a few words of patronage and approval.

Miss Hardy said very little, but she squeezed Clara's hand affectionately, and it may be showed in her moistened eyes that one sort

of apprehension was sensibly lightened. Perhaps a quarter of an hour intervened between the moment of the actress stepping from the stage under a shower of applause and that in which she had to resume her part. The coming scene was one of the most critical in the play, but Clara now felt assured of her powers, and, what was something hardly less important, of the temper and appreciative faculties of her judges. She stepped on the boards now with a less palpitating heart than at first, and with much more of true courage; and Miss Hardy took up her old position at the wing with far greater composure than she could have summoned half an hour before.

It is almost tritely true to say that evil rarely comes to us shaped according to our imaginative fears, for the dark, amorphous shadow which we call presentiment is generally thrown by an agglomeration of small facts and half-developed circumstances. It was at the moment when Mrs. Blake was prepared to display to the uttermost such histrionic power as she possessed, and that her cousin was looking on with something approaching resignation at the scene, that a

gentleman, whose shoulder and half-profile only had been previously visible, changed places with a friend, and by doing so placed himself full-face towards the stage. The pair occupied the nearest private box, a box which participated in the glare thrown out by the footlights, and nearly at the same moment that Beta noticed the movement, and felt a vague impression that she had seen one of the personages before, the poor actress recognised in him her husband's implacable foe, Mr. Basil Moore! The exigencies of her part drew her to the very edge of the stage—she stood within six feet of the man whom she instinctively dreaded, and who seemed associated in some inextricable manner with the great misfortunes of her life. Her brain reeled under the shock, the words she had to utter escaped her memory, but once, twice, the ready prompter helped her, and though she felt the "Basilisk" gaze was on her, she clutched wildly at the hope that she was not recognised. But not for long; in a pause of her own speaking she heard Basil Moore's pitiless voice exclaim, addressing his companion—

"Now are you convinced? *I* knew the

Jezebel the moment she stepped on the boards."

I think if Basil Moore could have looked into the heart his presence had stricken, even he, hard, vindictive as he was, would have been touched with pity,—would not at least have spoken those words at that moment, in the clear, incisive tones that were intended to reach her ear.

With this scene the tide of opinion changed, even among the most favourably-disposed of the audience. There was no more clapping of hands, gloved or ungloved, saving in two or three attempts of the manager's friends to lead applause—attempts soon discontinued, as those individuals did not desire to make themselves conspicuous. At the end of the first act there was no calling for the *debûtante* before the curtain to pay for encouraging bouquets with grateful curtsies; indeed, before all was over, hisses, chorused and prolonged, were sufficiently audible, while among the audience there circulated phrases of condemnation, which stifled the manager's last hope that the new actress might prove worth engaging.

"Raw amateur!"

"Insolent not to have learnt her part!"

"Struck with stage fright!"

"Twenty years too old for such a character!"

"Mistaken her vocation!"

"A soured old maid!"

"Well, certainly she looks miserable enough to play the starved apothecary in Romeo and Juliet!"

"They'd better keep her, then, for that character!"

The unanimity of censure was remarkable, but then people are wonderfully gregarious on such occasions, and if there were a few sympathetic observers who noted that the first scene of the new actress gave a promise which was strangely unfulfilled, we may be pretty sure that such observers were low-voiced and gentle persons, apt to be humble about their own opinions when they differed from those of the majority, and who, having learnt sympathy with disappointment through their own want of success in life, were of course people of no influence or position. Ah, "position" is a great thing. A sparrow on the top of the Monument has a fine view of London, but it does not quite follow that the pert bird

knows much about the philosophy of the great metropolis.

Poor Clara Blake! she had thought herself nerved for failure, but, alas! failure had taken an undreamed-of shape. But for the presence of that dreadful man, which had in one minute unnerved the energies she had so resolutely braced up for service, which had robbed her memory of its power, and conjured up the phantoms of past woe, while it swept to the ground that fabric she had based on the hope of present concealment; but for that presence she persuaded herself all would have been, *must* have been quite different. She would have gone through her part with ever-progressing triumph, and closed the evening amid rapturous applause. And now!—she read her fate in the manager's face before he said gravely, with the air of one who closes a question, "Madam, it is a *fiasco!*"

What tears were those she sobbed out on Beta's shoulder as the cab drove rapidly to the London Bridge Station! The poor Julie, faithful according to her light of fidelity, sitting opposite and staying her own tears as best she might; for Julie was personally and bitterly, as well as sympathetically, disappointed.

The big box travelled back with Miss Hardy to her lodgings, and Clara Blake travelled home after "spending the day in town," with the thought that the part she had yet before her to "act" was perhaps harder than any she had yet accomplished. It was a great relief to her mind to hear that Mr. Blake, rather more fatigued than usual, had already retired to rest; and to feel that she could lie down without showing her face, and without the need of further speech than the interchange of a kind good night. But sleep! That was not easily to be obtained. When she did doze off she quickly awoke with a start, after repeating in dreams some of the events of the past day, or realizing the horrors of a cruel criticism in some well-known newspaper, in which the "Beaufort" mask was cruelly stripped off.

CHAPTER XVII.

COMPTON BLAKE.

"My brain is drowned now—quite drowned; all I feel
Is . . . is at swift-recurring intervals;
A hurrying down within me, as of waters
Loosened to smother up some ghastly pit."

ROBERT BROWNING.

NOTWITHSTANDING a severe head-ache, that was betrayed by her pale cheeks and sunken eyes, Mrs. Blake was the first of the little household who appeared at the breakfast-table the next morning. She thought it a momentous chance that she was able to cut open the damp sheet of the newspaper without any observer of her trembling fingers. For a minute or two she fancied it contained no theatrical notice whatever; and the omission seemed terrible; for, to her fearful ima-

gination it implied, that there was so much of vituperation in store that it was reserved for a more careful expression than could be hastily prepared. But soon her mind was relieved. After all, the monster sheet had in its columns a brief paragraph, merely stating that at the Parthenon Theatre the preceding evening an attempt had been made to revive such and such a drama, famous in the memory of old playgoers from its associations with one of the public's darlings twenty years ago. But the lady who made her first appearance as the heroine, though not devoid of certain drawing-room graces, had really mistaken her vocation. Beaufort was understood to be a mere *nom de Theatre*, and believing that the bearer was destined for the future only to the calmer arena of private life, it would be simply malicious to penetrate the mystery of her identity, even if they had the means of doing so.

How merciful, for the most part, are the true Titans of the Press! sometimes, though perhaps not often, they lift up a dwarf to be sunned, or scarified, upon their Atlas shoulders; but, for the most part, poor bruised and broken-winged insects, if touched at all,

are set down very gently. That notice was written by one who, though a stranger to Mrs. Blake, desired to befriend her rather than otherwise. To his fastidious judgment, he saw nothing even in her best acting that might not result in the perpetual sowing of seed for the harvest of disappointment; but he had felt all the wrath of a man in whom native chivalry was not extinct, at hearing some loud bitter words Basil Moore had spoken of her in the lobby of the theatre.

It is true that the conjunction of time and events had been rather unfortunate for Mr. Moore's temper. He had heard serious ill news that day; ill news which he fancied he could trace, however remotely, to Mr. Blake's failure last year. And he had drunk more champagne than was good for him at a morning *fête*, which had left him without appetite for dinner, and thrown him on the resource of a theatre to while away the evening.

Yet why did he choose that out-of-the-way minor theatre? Because even Mr. Basil Morre had in his stony nature some few softer spots, where the moss and lichens of tender recollections sometimes gathered. He

had loved his dead wife, and that old melodrama, revived for Clara's performance, was associated in his mind with the ethereal days of first love and happy courtship, when to sit in one dear presence could throw a halo round all the surroundings. Even Shylock had sacred recollections of a turquoise ring he had had from Leah "when he was a bachelor."

Surely Fate never appears so inexorable, and the Christian rendering of Predestination so little mystical, as when we mark how the small incidents of seeming chance and circumstance are taken up like little binding chains of steel, and woven into the very warp of life!

Millie Farrell was the second of the family who appeared at the breakfast-table; but she also had secret thoughts and private doings to hide. It was not yet twenty-four hours since she had stood beside the coffin of Barbara Neville, and its shadow seemed still to be resting upon her. Perhaps she thought Mrs. Blake looked dull and ill, but to variableness of looks and temper in her aunt she had long been accustomed. Moreover, though in these years of her life she had a shrewd and penetrating judgment, Millie, like

most persons so endowed, was not of a suspicious disposition; and, since one day months ago, when Mrs. Blake had cautiously "sounded" her, and found it quite unlikely that she would ever connive at deceiving her uncle in any sort of way, she had concealed her plans from Millie as rigidly and successfully as she had from Mr. Blake himself. Therefore, though Millie had arrived at a tolerably correct judgment of Mrs. Blake's character and abilities, she had no clue by which to divine the especial manner in which her faculties had lately been engaged.

"I suppose there was no news yesterday," said Mrs. Blake, as she proceeded to measure out the tea. "I was in town till quite late last night, and have hardly spoken to your uncle yet."

"I also was in town till quite the evening," replied Millie; "but I am in hopes uncle was not very lonely. Clarry seemed to have quite amused him with her womanly ways, taking your place at dinner, and making tea for him afterwards."

"Ah!" returned the mother; "Julie absent as well as I, of course Clarry ran riot."

"Oh no, aunt, I assure you she was a per-

fectly good child. I heard my uncle tell her so before she went to bed; and really his 'God bless you, my child,' quite touched me, it was so spontaneous and pathetic. As I came in, I heard quite a chorus of laughter; and I am sure a little mirth does my uncle good."

"Yes, but he should not teach her to be a romp."

"There was no romping, aunt," replied Millie, as if determined to defend the child. "I found her sitting quietly on her papa's knee, and it seemed they had been talking a great deal about Agnes, Clarry wanting to know how *she* looked, and what *she* did when she was a little girl. You know what trifles sometimes amuse children, and I believe my uncle was describing his wedding, and how Agnes was a little white-frocked bridesmaid. Clarry is going to write a letter to Agnes, and say how fond papa is of her, and what a good memory he has, and something about a letter Agnes wrote when she was only eight years old, and which uncle says was the prettiest child's letter he ever saw."

"How ridiculous! filling the child's head with such nonsense," said Mrs. Blake.

Millie suddenly became conscious, from a sort of dark paleness that came over her aunt's face, that some disagreeable memory was touched, yet she could not help saying,—

"Oh, do you think so? I am sure, at any rate, that Agnes will be pleased to hear she is so kindly remembered."

"Shall you be at home to-day? I only ask because you have been out so much lately," said Mrs. Blake, really for the purpose of changing the conversation.

"Indeed yes, unless something quite unforeseen happens. I must settle now, if I can, to steady working days. I am dreadfully behind in all my engagements."

"It does seem an age since you published anything."

At this moment Mr. Blake entered the room, being rather late, and rather hurried for time. However, like the man of business that he was, he took up the newspaper and mastered the spirit of the money market and the city intelligence; and then, just glancing at the leading articles, rolled up the paper, as was his wont, and put it in his pocket to read in the train. He did not bestow ten minutes

on his breakfast, but he missed his little daughter, and inquired after her.

"Oh," said Mrs. Blake, "I suppose Julie is engaged with her. But you know she often breakfasts in the nursery."

"Yes, but she always comes to wish me good morning. I suppose she went to bed without having her hair curled—is that it?" he added good-humouredly. "However, I cannot wait for the little puss this morning; I have only just time to catch the train. Millie, tell her papa could not wait."

"I'll not forget. Let me open the door for you, uncle. What a lovely May morning it is."

But Millie turned away from looking at the blue sky and the rich greenery, from inhaling the luscious odour of the lilacs, and noticing the graceful waving of the laburnum's "yellow hair," to mount to her attic chamber, and there, with what faculties she could summon, to apply herself resolutely to literary work.

By this time, however, Millie was an experienced brain-labourer, and hope was not strong in her heart that she should this day, or perhaps for many days to come, fall into

the old shackles, and find thoughts flow harmoniously in her mind, and her pen glide rapidly over the paper. Just because Millie Farrell's power was mainly derived from her keen sympathy with life, was she in her literary career peculiarly open to distracting influences; and we know how stirring these had lately been.

Even now, as she leaned her head upon her hand, trying to gather her thoughts away from outer circumstances, and seeking to croon over topics long since labelled in her mind as materials for tales or essays, she found herself speculating whether it were really true, that ignorant, immature youth, with its narrower sympathies, but restive energies, was, after all, the season for the most prodigious labour? Could it be that her powers—she being still somewhat on the youthful side of thirty—were already waning? Her soul answered, No! But she began vaguely to comprehend how, as we advance in years, we are drawn into the race and the struggle; how, like the able-bodied voyagers by a leaky ship, we are called on to take our part in keeping down the surging waves of life, and how more and more diffi-

cult it becomes for the artist of any kind to weave together the threads of the art life and the human life. True, he must weave the human life largely and richly, or his art will be false and poor. But the art life must be often a thing apart, whether it be led by daily snatches, or by lengthened periods of indulgence.

Millie always gained strength by her solitary croonings; therefore, as the hours sped on, there is no wonder that she felt hopeful of herself, and hopeful that, for a time at any rate, there would be no outer event to force her from the inner path she was seeking so ardently to follow. Alas! for the futility of such hopes and expectations!

When Jackson cleared away the breakfast cloth, Mrs. Blake was standing with her back to the table, and seemed to be looking out of the window. In truth, she was hiding her face, which she knew must be clouded like a sky which portends rain. If tears would but flow, surely she would be better. But when she could have wept freely, she had restrained herself by an effort of will, and now she was oppressed with the weight of the hot, unshed burthen. When Clarry came into the room,

and prattled about papa and her new doll, and asked questions about sister Agnes, and why Julie was cross this morning, Mrs. Blake found the child insufferable, and suggested she should go and play with some young neighbours who had their rocking-horse out in the garden, and whose mother had often solicited Clarry's companionship for her little girls.

In the early hours of the afternoon, Elizabeth Hardy came over, impelled to the visit by pitying anxiety, and a belief that her presence might be some comfort to Clara. But hardly had the cousins met—hardly had Beta spoken some kind words of sympathy, and some wise words of encouragement for the future, when the parlour door opened, and Mr. Blake, entering with the slow, firm step, so expressive of suppressed emotion, stood before them. He did not notice Miss Hardy's greeting, much less return it; but closed and bolted the door, before speaking a word. He had not stood so erect since his illness; but he looked ten years older than he had done at breakfast time, and his eyes had a glare, that made his thin, pale face seem spectral.

"Pray do not leave us, Miss Hardy," he

exclaimed, misinterpreting a gesture of hers, and addressing her with unusual formality,—"if my memory serves me truly, you were present at our marriage—were aware of all its circumstances, and know better than any other friend or relative what conduct and confidence I have deserved from my wife."

The voice in which he spoke hardly seemed the voice of Compton Blake—it was so hard and bitter.

"Dear Mr. Blake," said Beta, attempting to lay her hand on his arm, though he shrank irritated from her touch; "Clara has always acknowledged you to be a most kind, indulgent husband; and I am certain you deserve all wifely love and gratitude."

"Deserve! But what have I received? Mrs. Blake! Clara!"—he exclaimed, in a strange passion of speech—as if he were blindly clutching at some receding force: "Clara, don't sit there like a mute, with guilt in your face, and your frightened eyes starting out of your head—but tell me whether it is a lie, or the truth, this story that Dr. Bryant came to condole with me about, an hour ago!"

Dr. Bryant! There was positive relief in

the name—for what could he know about the misery of last night? He, who was far too pseudo-fashionable a person to visit a third-rate theatre, and who moved in a circle remote from the orbit of Clara's cruel enemy! She did not remember that the Dr. Bryants of society are the very magpies of social life, unmatchable through all the realms of county town old-maidenism, for picking up the shining bits of town talk, and of lacerating scandal, with which to enrich their own nest of knowledge, and for chattering forth piquant stories and worn witticisms, regardless of everything but the interest of the moment. Not remembering all this, she clung to the suddenly presented straw of hope, and exclaimed with eager indignation,—

"What story has Dr. Bryant presumed to invent about me?"

"Oh, Clara, that it were an invention! but the facts are too stubborn. Basil Moore told the story at his club last night, and a little world of people know by this time that you were the unsuccessful actress of last night. Only they think I urged you to the step, that it was even repugnant to yourself—and if Bryant did not suspect the whole truth from

my manner, why let people deceive themselves; it makes them feel more kindly to you no doubt—though it is hard—just when things were looking so much better, but I would wish to be your protector to the last. I think I am getting confused about right and wrong. Oh, my poor head! Seeing you look so pale and frightened, has broken down my resolution; for, Clara, I have loved you very dearly, I have. I have been a fool about you. And it is your want of confidence in me that stings me so—your being able to do all this unsuspected—your being able to carry it through—to go out yesterday—to come home and say good night as you did—and kiss me—yes, with the stage paint hardly washed off—"

By this time Clara was weeping bitterly, and Beta ventured to say—

"Oh! Mr. Blake, forgive her—she is suffering her punishment, and her intentions—indeed, her intentions were far from evil."

"Do not speak, Miss Hardy—do not speak unless it be to tell me that you were the persuader in the matter; as indeed, I think, and wish to think you were."

"I—!" but it was not for Beta to defend herself at the present juncture; and, indeed,

a wildness in the poor husband's manner filled her with a new terror.

"Yes, yes," continued Mr. Blake, and now his softened voice was thick and impeded—"yes, yes. I see how it was, you helped and aided her—and you so much older, you ought to have known better!—*she* is a mere girl still. —I saw Agnes just now playing in the next garden—yes, Agnes, Agnes Bendoran, and there's Clarry, a baby that can't walk, she could not have left her willingly. Yes, Miss Hardy, you should have known better Clara, come to me, and tell me how it was, and then wash off that stage paint, it makes you look a woman of forty."

The unpainted face changed the character of its fright at this betrayal of a wandering mind; and as Clara rose to meet her husband's outstretched arms, Compton Blake tottered back—a frightful convulsion passed over his countenance—and before Jackson could appear in answer to the piteous cries of the wife and her cousin, the poor sufferer lay prone under a far severer seizure of paralysis than that of the previous year.

It was the letter which Elizabeth Hardy

wrote the next day, which reached Florence at a singular juncture, and made Lady Isabella Clinton exclaim, "Agnes, I will take you to England. It is a new position of affairs, but I find no difficulty in deciding what should be done."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A PASSING AWAY.

"I have seen my little boy oft scourge his top,
And compar'd myself to't; nought made me e'er
Go right, but heaven's scourge stick."

JOHN WEBSTER.

COMPTON BLAKE did not die that bright May-day, when suddenly, without warning note of preparation, the troubles of these latter times culminated in the knowledge of his wife's deception. The wife, whom he had loved with an abiding love—a tideless tenderness, pure and strong enough to have satisfied the dainty thirst of a nobler woman's heart—had been found capable of mean subterfuges and stealthy plottings, in order that she might take a step which she could not but know was repugnant to her husband's feelings,

opinions, and prejudices. Had she dared openly to oppose his wishes, and to contend and argue with him, as she had done on a hundred minor occasions, he could have forgiven her, even if she had persisted in her plan, and brought down on her head the titter of scorn which was this day echoing far and fast in the circle of her *ci-devant* acquaintances. For it was not the fact of her failure which drove the arrow home to his heart; no, he loved her too well for that to be the case, and in reality this buzz of contempt raised a conflict in his soul, by mingling pity with his anger. When the wind and the waves are at war, we know how the storm rages.

Compton Blake did not die that day, but the shock which he received was his death blow. Dr. Bryant, meddling, chattering busybody that he was, had come to his cousin's house of business, assumedly to offer condolence on the failure of the preceding night, but also no doubt to charge himself with circumstantial particulars that might make him an authority on the subject of Mrs. Blake's theatrical *début*. It had never entered his mind that she could have taken this step unknown to her husband, and when with a long

face, and phrases wherein hope and compliments, and sympathetic lamentations were grotesquely mingled, he opened out the subject, and made the truth hideously apparent, his words probed the poor husband's heart, and acted like lacerating instruments in the hands of an awkward and ignorant operator. He saw that somehow he had done mischief, but he was much too vain and shallow a personage to measure the suffering he had inflicted. Mr. Blake controlled himself to a marvel, but had only just enough strength of body and mind remaining to bring him home, that both might give way as we have seen, in the presence of his wretched wife.

And now the house is hushed, and there is a coming and going of doctors, and people walk about on tip-toe, and there is a suspension of all ordinary avocations by every member of the household. Harry, the schoolboy, is sent for home, in readiness for the most solemn farewell, and little Clarissa and her brother sit hand in hand, weeping till their eyes are red and swollen, but rather from an infectious sympathy with the bitter tears their elders are shedding, than from a real understanding of "how dreadful it would be

if poor papa should die." The bullfinch mopes in the dull room where the children are sitting; or perhaps the room has been darkened to keep the bird quiet. From time to time there is the thud of the leathered knocker, or the harsh jar of the muffled bell. Friends call and send to make anxious inquiries, often with offers of any available services. Even harsh creditors are softened by the advent of death—all but one.

The June days come, and drag on their hot and weary lengths, and the really short nights seem to have borrowed from some storehouse of time additional minutes, and still science tells the same story. "It may not be immediate; it may be many days, perhaps even some weeks, before the departure; probably the mind will rally first, and that will be a sign that it is near. But there will be no recovery." And science came and went, but, after a very little while, did as science very often does with the poor—genteel poor not less than vulgar—waived aside the golden guerdon, and accepted only the hand-clasp of gratitude.

Compton Blake had tender watchers around him to share the duties of nurses. Elizabeth

Hardy, never left the house she had entered under such different auspices, until all was over; and Millie Farrell added the solemn teaching of a second death-chamber to her varied experiences of life, instead of working out, for the world's profit, those already acquired. Mrs. Farrell also came to imprint a kiss on her brother's cheek, and to unhinge the stronger minds about her, by her uncontrolled weeping and foolish exclamations. Every one — and, perhaps, her daughter chiefly—felt relief when she was persuaded to go home;—silly, undisciplined people are so terribly in the way at any great crisis. When we are happy and amiable—amiable through our happiness—we can put up with them easily enough, and drown silly speech in the echoes of legitimate mirth; but the delicate minor of sorrow has no vibration that can overpower the noisy ebullitions of absolute folly.

But there was another woman watcher, the nearest and dearest, and most devoted of all. The tender hallucination that Mrs. Blake was still his fair young bride yet prevailed, to the utter blotting out of her recent errors and the recent troubles. This hallucination

touched her to the quick; it warmed, it vivified her nature, and melted the ice about her heart, and so cracked and broke the corresponding outer habits of selfishness. Miss Hardy was amazed by the readiness with which Clara encountered fatigue and sleeplessness, and all manner of personal discomfort; amazed, too, that, amid all the trouble, she was learning to be considerate for others, gentle towards their short-comings, forbearing in her exactions. It was as if some blind impulse of her nature was prompting her to be all that the poor sufferer, in his rambling speech, declared that she was. Would the change be permanent, or was it necessary for the heat of a great sorrow to be present, to keep up the thaw? This was the question, for, alas, such phenomena were not quite new to Elizabeth Hardy. She had seen sorrow soften hard natures before now, but with different permanent results.

A great deal has been said about the awfulness of sudden death; to souls capable of the emotion, death must always be charged with awe. But I apprehend the framers of our Liturgy, when they included sudden death among the direst of calamities, thought only

of the soul that without warning was called to its account; not of the effect the catastrophe produced on bystanders. By a gradual misapplication of ideas, some persons have grown to misadapt the thought, and to assume as an axiom, that sudden death teaches the most solemn of all lessons to the survivors. Perhaps this is not an unqualified truth, nor one applicable to all natures.

When a king comes suddenly upon his people, unheralded, uncrowned—be it for beneficent purposes of pardon and release, or with harsh utterances and frowning brow, his state and authority are not as duly recognised as when at the city gates the keys are meekly surrendered, and a royal pageant passes on with measured step, between expectant throngs. So seems it to me that the King of Terrors is never so lordly as when his dark chariot advances solemnly, and with even pace, having the way made for its wheels among the dense crowd of the living.

The death-bed of Compton Blake was surely inexpressibly solemn. The gradual wasting of flesh and strength, the flickering of the mind, the helplessness of one who, less than a year ago, was full of life and vigour—

who, only the other day, seemed rallying back to health and energy, all told of the Power that was come—the Power unswerving, irresistible. Why, a fortnight has passed already, and, if he had been struck dead that bitter day, do we not all know that the darkened house would have been open to the sunshine by now, and the mourners would have been growing used to their new black garments, and would have looked back on that King of Terrors only as a vague form of might and horror. But now they have been studying his lineaments day by day—they know his terror, but see also his benignant majesty. The half-pagan, half-monkish Idea of Death, which still lingers in the mind of even Protestant Christendom, has faded out of their hearts, and all the human watchers are brought nearer to the spiritual world, as if their souls were to be permitted to drift forward a little way, in company with the departing spirit. They feel the ministering Presences that are all around; and in the midnight mundane silences have their senses spiritually attuned. Awful still is the King, but awful with a divine majesty; for the angels bear his train, and barb his dart, and

make for him a canopy of state with their radiant garments.

It is known that Agnes is returning to England, with the hope of seeing her step-father once more before he dies, and of ministering to her mother's comfort according to her ability. The news had startled Mrs. Blake, for she had not expected an act which seemed so very like a sacrifice. Something she murmured about its being a pity to break up Agnes's studies, and to spend so much money; and I do not think the idea of her daughter's coming was one of unmixed gladness—yet, what could she say, but that it was kind and good of her to be so devoted!

It had been one of those paradisal days which make travellers from the north and south, the east and the west, alike admit that our leafy English June—if true to its name and its promise—is the very pearl of times and seasons. The sun was sinking towards the north in all the glory which gave assurance of a lovely morrow; night-singing birds were warbling as if surcharged with joy, and making the suburban gardens their concert halls and corridors; the rose-scented air whispered of Eden, as it fluttered the window-curtains of

the sick chamber, and nature was struggling so hard to speak articulately of peace, and joy, and good will to man, that perforce the human heart listened more or less consciously, sensitively, or respondingly.

Surely there are few things in life so pathetic as that struggling and aspiring of the soul towards beauty and poetry, and all the lovelinesses of nature, which we may watch in the world's hard workers, condemned to spend their freshest, strongest energies in the daily toil that shall procure their daily bread. It is like the silent struggling towards comprehension which we often see in a faithful dumb creature, but with a vivid something superadded which marks the erect humanity. Of course it is not all our working classes who have this yearning aspiration, and it is the absence of it in their recreations which we call vulgarity, and which shocks our tastes, and wounds us in a hundred petty ways, just as the same defect in a higher grade of society tortures us, when our own shield of indifferentism and society's scabbard of formal acquired politeness happen to be thrown away.

Perhaps the toilers in our great towns have

more of this aspiration than our country peasantry; I think they have, and I see reasons why it should be so. Certainly, to watch the demeanor of our artisans, as only in the summer-time we can watch them, is not the least profitable study to the thoughtful observer. After a night of broken rest and a day of anxious watching, Elizabeth Hardy, respited for a time from Mr. Blake's bedside, was sitting at the little parlour window, as she had done many an evening lately, finding refreshment of body in the light breeze, and perhaps unconsciously to herself, refreshment of mind in the varied scenes which were presented to her. Now passed a homely couple, limb-wearied indeed with their day's holiday, but mind-strengthened, as any true seer could see. There are with them two tired children to coax or to carry—nevertheless, that great nosegay, which is already fainting for want of the jug of tepid city water in which it will soon be tenderly plunged, must not be dropped or damaged. Two women pause in their gossip to regard the gorgeous sunset, and exclaim, to mark a contrast, but no doubt in shocking English, "There ain't no chimney-pots here to hide

the sky." Boys in free development of the true boy nature, are shouldering cricket-bats; and full-grown cricketers, members of a suburban club, flannel-shirted and soft-slippered, are busily engaged within sight of Montgomery Row. Thus the different classes jostle but do not mingle; and looking and thinking, thought just fluttering with an ostrich wing, Miss Hardy finds in a measure she is taken out of "herself" and the present woes, and set somewhat nearer to the harmony of the season. It is one of the many blessed dispensations by which we are compensated for the loss of youth, that, as we grow older, we do in our climbing rise more and more above the earth fogs, and see the reconciling lights on high with an ever swifter and keener glance than heretofore.

And thus the evening waned and the twilight deepened, and Jackson came out with a huge watering-pot to refresh the few dust-soiled flowers which condescended to bloom in the morsel of north garden. Poor Jackson! he was nearly the most miserable person in the house, and in his restless anxiety he courted and made occupation wherever he could find it. Every office of attendance on

his dear master that could fall to his province was devotedly performed, and his were the strong arms always ready to lift the poor sufferer from the bed to the couch. But these services did not fill up his time. His present gardening task was barely completed when a carriage drew up at the gate, and he found himself just in readiness to hand from it Agnes Bendoran. There was another lady in the carriage, who did not alight, but to whom Miss Hardy was made known. Indeed, "cousin Beta" got into the carriage, and talked to Lady Isabella Clinton for a quarter of an hour, the result of such interview being that Agnes was left in Montgomery Row, and Lady Isabella returned alone to her London hotel.

Who can track the paths by which the mind, lost in the mazes of delirium, finds suddenly its outlet to the open way of clear recollections and perfect sanity? When in the dim twilight Agnes first stood by Mr. Blake's bedside, he did not appear to recognise her; but the next morning, when little Clarry had been lifted on to the foot of the bed, and Agnes had, for the time being, taken her mother's place, his eyes wandered from the one

to the other, till quietly, not very suddenly, reason was again enthroned, and he feebly stretched forth the not disabled left hand, in token of recognition of his stepdaughter. "I have had bad dreams," he murmured, "and must have been very ill."

Then gradually his mind grew fully to realise what had been dreaming and what was fact, and a shade of anguish passed over his face as thought reverted to his chief sorrow. It was at this moment that his wife drew near, and she saw that as reason had returned, the fond delusion concerning herself had fled. It was no longer the idolized bride on whom he gazed, but the very faulty wife, yet never had her face worn such a look as that it now bore; pale and haggard, old and care-worn, she seemed; nevertheless, the contrition that really was awakening in her heart sent its light into her countenance, and the meek, searching, and unflinching gaze with which she met his eyes, touched his heart a thousand times more surely than the renovation of her youth and beauty, had it been possible, could have done.

The sufferer grew agitated, his eyes were suffused, and he made a movement as if to

open his arms to his wife. She obeyed the sign, and sinking her face to his, felt that she was forgiven.

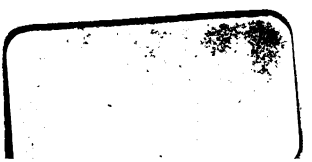
"Only one deception in a life," he whispered, as if in apology and defence of Clara, "only one; it would be hard, indeed, if I rebuked her. Agnes, you must not think evil of your mother. She never deceived you or me before, did she?"

Why was it that the memory of her childish letter, with all the recollections grouped around it, would intrude at this solemn moment, would forbid her to utter the frank "never, never," that ought to have leaped to her tongue, would compel her to frame some set speech that should not be false, and still would not suggest the very truth? Yet she was beneficently spared such utterance. Her infirmity, in these latter times so seldom noticeable, became painfully apparent, and the dying man, interpreting her stammering speech according to his wish, drew her towards him with a blessing and a kiss.

With a flush like that with which the forked lightning momentarily illuminates a whole city, Agnes saw the blessings that had been hidden in the stammer of her speech.

Had her childish thoughts been volubly prattled on her mother's second wedding-day, how differently might that mother's after-life have been rounded. Had she, the Painter, not been still the unready Speaker, how miserably might a death-chamber have been disturbed, and the thoughts that were winging upwards been held down by unavailing regrets! Agnes bowed her soul meekly, in final acceptance of her burthen, and rising beneath her load, found that half its weight had slipped away.

Compton Blake died the next day, died with his wife's hand in his, and all those he best loved beside him. He had whispered many last wishes, and sent some messages of friendship and of forgiveness. He had commended his little children to their "sister" Agnes, and he had received the last consolation of the Church from the hands of Wilberforce Serle.

END OF VOL. II.

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